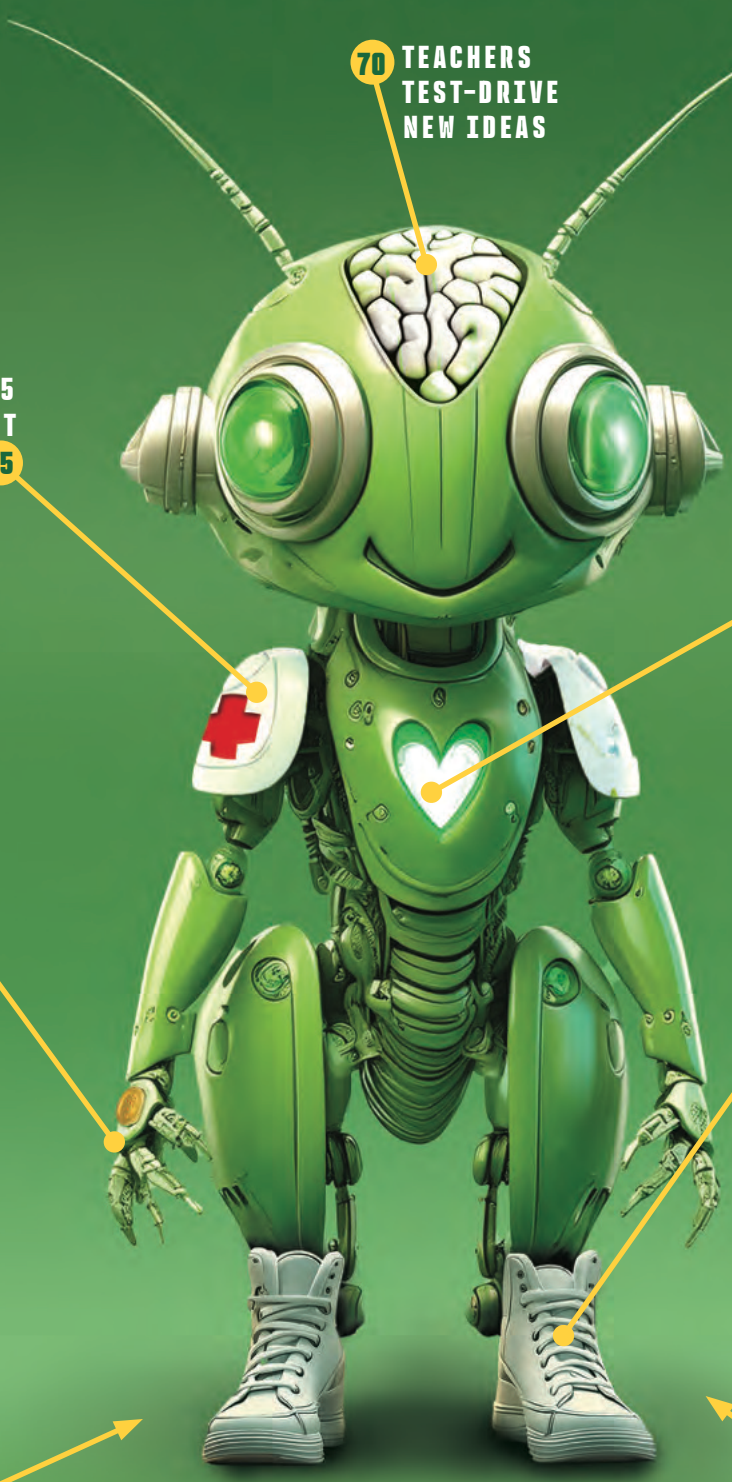
SPRING 2024

GEORGETOWN DAYS



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INNOVATION & IMAGINATION ISSUE

SPRING 2024 GEORGETOWN DAYS MAGAZINE


Jason Putsché

OUR MISSION DRIVES ALL THAT WE DO

GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL honors the integrity and worth of each individual within a diverse school community. GDS is dedicated to providing a supportive educational atmosphere in which teachers challenge the intellectual, creative, and physical abilities of our students and foster strength of character and concern for others. From the earliest grades, we encourage our students to wonder, to inquire, and to be self-reliant, laying the foundation for a lifelong love of learning.


Jason Putsché

We welcome submissions for *Georgetown Days* magazine from all GDS community members.

Please contact dina@gds.org to learn more.

Alumni are encouraged to send their news with photos to alumni@gds.org.



WHERE STUDENTS LOVE TO LEARN AND LEARN TO CHANGE THE WORLD

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Editor's Note: The magazine lists only first name and graduation year for Lower School students.

FROM WHERE I STAND

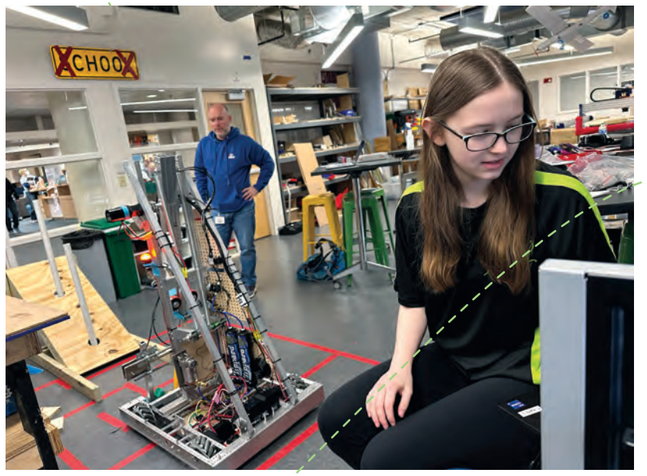


Russell Shaw,
Head of School

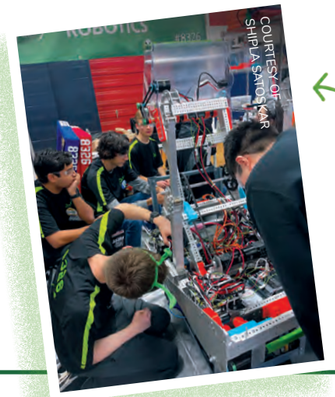
Innovation Steeped in a Mission

On a Tuesday in February, more than 50 former GDS Trustees gathered in the High School library to enjoy lunch and reconnect with each other and GDS. These stewards of our school, who served on the Board over seven different decades, share a deep commitment to our School's mission, purpose, and students. Attendees included Judith Martin (aka Miss Manners), who graduated from GDS in 1970 and whose mother, Mrs. Perlman, was a legendary teacher and one of only three teachers in the School's history who was not addressed by first name. George Idelson, who was on the Board in the 1970s and who is now a proud GDS grandparent, also joined us. After we sang "Happy Birthday" to George (it was his 99th!), he debonairly tipped his hat to the room. Collectively, our guests represented hundreds of years of faithful service to Georgetown Day School.

While the Trustees dined, I provided an update on life at GDS in 2024. Some of them marveled at changes in the School. They learned of new traditions such as Hopper Tank and the Senior Walk, watched students in the innovation space building robots for an upcoming competition, and visited the new Lower/Middle School building, where I gave a tour. As they heard about the 11 different bus routes bringing students to and from School and applauded the salad bar in the dining hall, many commented on how things had evolved in recent decades. Still, the student sitting with a teacher on a hallway floor revising an English essay, backpacks strewn across the Forum, and peals of laughter echoing in stairwells reassured them that GDS is still GDS.



Liz Higday '25 codes in the Innovation Lab while HS Innovation & Computer Science Teacher Matthew Bachiochi observes the results.



Hopper robotics team does some troubleshooting at the FIRST Robotics Competition in Ashland, VA.

FROM WHERE I STAND

Judith Martin '70 (aka Miss Manners) views her own photo.



This issue of *Georgetown Days* explores innovation. I am proud of the ways in which GDS evolves and embraces new opportunities for learning. Some innovation is driven by faculty, such as our transformational Policy Institute, which will celebrate 10 years of programming this summer and for which new policy "tracks" are created each year. Other innovation is driven by students, including last year's Integration Bee, in which High School students competed in solving calculus integrals in front of a rowdy audience. Thanks to a gift from the Perlin Family Foundation, GDS has been able to launch a new Innovation Fund this year. The fund will allow teachers to pilot original, experimental programs that are not currently covered by the annual budgetary process and make them a reality. We are excited to see the fruits of this effort enrich learning for our students.

Innovation is all well and good so long as we don't lose sight of what's most important: a learning environment that is joyful, in which students have the opportunity to connect with purpose, and in which they experience a sense of belonging. The spark of delight that animates a student's school day can emerge from a dynamic new program or a well-worn tradition. Our kids will "wonder and inquire," as our mission calls them to do, when we provide them with great teachers and a resource-rich environment, and when adults model curiosity and excitement. Passionate teachers, strong human connections, and a vibrant community will remain at the heart of who we are and what we do, no matter what innovation may bring. And so in 2045, when former trustees come to campus to celebrate GDS's centennial, I envision a School community shaped by innovation and evolution and anchored in our mission, the ever-present foundation on which we can build.

Russell



(from left) Judith Martin '70, John Oberdorfer, Jackie Marlin, Birthday boy George Idelson, Ed Levin, Len Downie, Judy Lichtman, and Leroy Nesbitt '78 were among the former trustees who visited GDS.



(from left) Michael Desautels, MS Science teacher, offers guidance to Thalia Grigsby '28 and Sadie Elleithee '28.

PHOTOS BY JASON PUTSCHÉ

MAKING ELEMENTAL CONNECTIONS



Dominic Weimer '28 (left) and Tessa Lipman '28 doing lab work in Michael's class

MIDDLE SCHOOL SCIENCE TEACHER Michael Desautels was mulling over ideas on how to improve the 8th grade chemistry unit on elements–à la periodic table–when he came across an article about the dangerous cobalt mining practices in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The article inspired him to revamp the unit and connect it to the School's broader social justice mission.

In the updated unit, students examine the societal impact of 20 elements found in familiar objects, including batteries, cell phones, and electric cars. "We focus on some of the worst offenders, such as gold, mercury, arsenic, and cobalt," said Michael.

(top of page) Maceo Lindsey '28 and (bottom of page, from left) Arav Bapna '28, Paul Sussmann '28 and Sam Leveton '28 work on completing their experiments.



The students compile research on their assigned element before plotting its place of origin on a Google Earth map and producing research papers and oral presentations."We limited the scope of the writing to focus on the human and environmental impact, the properties of the element that make it useful, and why the mining and practices used to isolate the minerals are so bad," Michael said. "Many students are shocked by what they learn, but it's important information for them to know."

When Merrell Palmer '27 took the class last school year, she learned that lithium is used for electric vehicle batteries, air conditioning systems, and even mood disorder treatment. "It was a really cool experience that allowed us to learn about uses of the elements in our day-to-day life and connect what we were learning in science to the real world," Merrell said.

But she also learned that for some communities, the damage inflicted by the mining of lithium—including its fallout on public health—far outweighs its contributions. "There was a specific case of an indigenous community protesting the placement of a lithium mine on the land they had been on for years because of the harmful effects on the environment and the communities surrounding it," Merrell said.

Students discovered that the well-documented harm caused by poor mining practices in some parts of the world is often overlooked due to the overwhelming demand for these elements.

Michael said that when he initially revamped the unit with help from MS Science teacher Jon Vanegas and MS Instructional Coach Jana Rupp, he considered having the students investigate solutions. But the team decided that the political and economic factors driving bad practices were too involved for one unit. Instead, they focused on raising student awareness and creating a solid foundation from which students can leap into future research.



Students used Google Earth maps to plot the place of origin of each element they were studying.





LMS visual arts teachers Ashley Ortiz and John Headley admire the Tokyo skyline.

FIELDWORK

SEEKING OUT THE OLD TO MAKE THE NEW

JOHN HEADLEY AND ASHLEY ORTIZ, both LMS visual arts teachers, spent 10 days in Japan this summer and returned with a deeper appreciation of Japanese printmaking and bookbinding, traditional art forms that they have exposed their students to this school year.

The trip was part of a residency offered by Boston's Montserrat College of Art through its program in Niigata, which lies along the Sea of Japan. With a group of roughly a dozen other educators, Ashley and John spent seven-hour days in class at the Niigata College of Art and Design learning about two types of bookbinding and a centuries-old color printmaking technique that uses wood planks and special water-based inks.

John described the experience as "intense" and illuminating. "It is important in terms of professional development to always get us [teachers] excited about art so that we don't burn out," he said. "To be a student again and learn about new techniques helped me develop more empathy for my own students."





For more than a week last summer, Ashley and John spent seven hours a day in class at the Niigata College of Art and Design in Japan.

Ashley was intrigued by this program when she heard about it on social media in part because it offered to teach concrete skills that she knew she could apply in class. Since joining GDS, Ashley has been teaching students how to make their own sketchbooks from scratch. "Each year it has been a different kind of sketchbook-making technique because I felt like I hadn't found one that worked yet," Ashley said.

In Japan, she was captivated by the bookbinding techniques and the different stitches that are often taken for granted because they are typically covered by material. Instruction started with a traditional Japanese binding stitch and progressed to more intricate designs. "In total, I made 12 different books with different styles and ranges of stitches," Ashely said, adding that she gained valuable insight from her teacher, who was well-versed in making sketchbooks. "It was great to have his perspective and expertise. I was able to troubleshoot with him there."

This year, Ashley shared with students what she had learned. "I was able to show them the books I made, and they looked at the different bindings," she said, "We then took about three weeks to make sketchbooks using authentic-styled instruments: the hammers and the awls [needles with a handle to puncture the paper.] … They'd never made or bound a book before. Some kids told me they were more connected to it; they literally punctured every page." Two students even applied the skills they learned to projects outside the classroom; one made sketchbooks as gifts for her family members, and another made a squarer version for herself.

While Ashley immersed herself in bookbinding, John delved into printmaking. He enjoyed the class's visits to museums in Tokyo, where he could see real-life applications of the processes, materials, and equipment he had been learning about in class. He and Ashley got to practice using a baren, a hand-held tool made of a leaf tied off with bamboo that helps ink stay on the paper.

John said he's eager to put his new-found skills to use at GDS. "I am working with one of our English teachers to help the students print something for their poetry unit," said John.

Ashley's students made sketchbooks using Japanese bookbinding techniques and tools.





Kihika Hyera '26 working with HS Innovation and Computer Science teacher Andrew Heine in the Innovation Lab

Jason Adler '24 pitches his idea for a climbing gym in the Entrepreneurship class.

TURNING IDEAS INTO ACTION

WITHIN THE PAST TWO ACADEMIC YEARS, the High School's Innovation team has launched two new courses that are designed to ignite students' creative and entrepreneurial spirits.

As with many of the courses offered by the HS Innovation and Computer Science Department, both classes provide hands-on and experiential learning inspired by the idea-driven environment of the School's Innovation Lab, which helps faculty and students with 3D printing, laser-cutting, and other technologies that can produce parts for real-world engineering.

That turning-ideas-into-reality mentality motivated Andrew Heine, an HS Innovation and Computer Science teacher, to introduce the Entrepreneurship class this year in addition to the Foundations in Programming: Video Game Concentration course that he launched two years ago. Both courses push students to think outside the box about what they want to create, how they plan to engineer it, and which audience they are trying to target.

In the Entrepreneurship class, students learned about developing brand identity as well as the basics of marketing and customer research. A good portion of the course focused on money management and number-crunching–such as reading balance sheets, negotiation techniques–and understanding the differences between business structures such as partnerships and business liability companies. But especially popular were the guest speakers.

"I loved that we were able to get a sneak peek of what it's like to build our own business through the speaker talks," said Christian Charles '24, "Entrepreneurs shared stories and offered us advice."

As for the Video Game course, it pushed students to tap into different sets of skills, specifically coding and design, no small feat given that nearly everyone in the class was new to both, Andrew said. The students designed a few games by themselves early on in the class with assistance from Andrew before creating one game solo and then collaborating on a more complex game. Slowly, the students gained enough skills to produce two-dimensional games with a storyline, several characters, and multiple levels.

Not only did they need to conquer the coding, but they had to think through the experience they wanted for the players. Relaxing? Challenging? Suspenseful? "It's really hard to make a game fun," Andrew said, "It's not all about being a good coder or being a good artist. The concept has to be interesting and you have to have a thoughtful approach."

Ben Bellavia-Cortezi '26 wanted his solo game to include adventure and exploration. "I like platforming games. I play a lot of those in my free time so I wanted to make one of those," Ben said. "I'm also interested in games that are exploration-based, in which you are trying to figure out what's going on in the world of the game, and you don't know what to do immediately. So that's what I was trying to build going into it. Creating that was moderately difficult, but I achieved what I was aiming for."

the Hopper Fund
SUPPORT OUR MISSION IN ACTION

WHAT IS THE GDS RIPPLE EFFECT?

A GIFT TO GDS TODAY MAKES AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT ON THE STUDENTS AND FACULTY ON CAMPUS AND WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR YEARS TO COME.

"GDS helped to instill my love of learning. ... Today, I find myself leaning into asking questions and diving deeper. It has helped me find joy and excel in my career and interests/hobbies.



LAURA LONDON '07



ALEJANDRO ROSENBERG '98

"Being a student at GDS equipped me with crucial academic and social competencies that have helped me succeed at each stage of my career. ...Being in an environment that embraced diversity but didn't shy away from value commitments taught me how to thrive amidst the challenges of a polarized world "

"The NGO my father worked for made it possible for me to attend GDS by covering the bulk of my tuition. Not everyone is so lucky, so I give to the Hopper Fund for financial aid and hope that I can help others have the same world-class education that I received."



CHRIS HOPSON '15

MAKE A GIFT TODAY AT GDS.ORG/GIVING, AND WATCH THE RIPPLE CONTINUE.



Fourth graders made signs in support of SMYAL, which empowers LGBTQ+ youth in the DC region.

LOWER SCHOOL STUDENTS ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

LOWER SCHOOL STUDENTS are partnering with DC-area organizations that serve a range of constituencies as part of a program designed to help students gain a deeper understanding of social justice themes and empower them to take informed action.

The partnerships expand on the offerings of the Community Engagement and Experiential Learning (CEEL) office. The office has organized a robust Middle School co-curricular experiential program for the past five years and oversees the High School's community service, Minimester, and Policy Institute programs. Now, CEEL has set its sights on GDS's youngest scholars, connecting each grade with a local organization that works in areas relevant to that grade's academic curriculum.

"We want the Lower School students to learn about themselves and develop a sense of what issues they care about and the real-world implications of the themes that come up in the classroom," said CEEL Director Leigh Tait.

In fall 2023, each partner organization visited its respective grade on campus, and then several hosted GDS students at their offices off campus. Mary Katherine '32 said that she learned what the LGBTQ+ acronym stands for when fourth graders visited with employees at SMYAL, which supports and empowers LGBTQ+ youth in the Washington region.

"We learned that just because someone is not exactly like you, you should still be kind," Mary Katherine said. "And if you know someone, like a friend or family member, who is part of the LGBTQ+ community–or if you just feel like helping, you can be an ally to that community."

Hannah '32 said she learned that a large percentage of DC's youth who are unhoused are LGBTQ+, in part because they are shunned by their families. "That was shocking," Hannah said. "[SMYAL] has therapy and helps people who are kicked out of their family's house. They work with a coffee shop as well called As You Are, and it's a place where people can be themselves and have karaoke nights and poetry nights. It made me think: 'Wow. I'm proud of this place.'"

Classroom teachers identified the themes in their grades that would benefit from community engagement, and the CEEL office connected each grade with a relevant partner. For instance, the 1st grade's focus on community action led to their partnership with Friendship Place, which provides services to people experiencing homelessness.

Christina Lafontant-Bridgeforth, one of the Lower School's CEEL coordinators, said the 1st graders inundated Air Force veteran Alan Banks with questions when he spoke to them about how he started working for Friendship Place after the organization helped him overcome his struggle with mental illness and the loss of his home. "They were genuinely interested in what Alan had to say," said Christina, a 2nd grade teacher. "The long-term goal is to have 1st graders be ambassadors when talking about people who are without homes."

The pre-K students, who are exploring family and traditions, partnered with the Seabury at Friendship Terrace senior living community; kindergarteners got a first-hand look at how Food Rescue US transfers surplus food from local businesses to people who are food insecure; 2nd graders delved into religion and spirituality at the DC Baha'i Center; and 3rd graders explored immigration by partnering with Mary's Center, a community health center initially created to help immigrant women fleeing Central America.

"Everywhere we've gone, the students are enthusiastically engaging with the people they meet," Christina said. "You can tell that they're really taking in all the information and processing it."



Mateo '37 makes a new friend at Seabury at Friendship Terrace.

Bastion '34 said he enjoyed playing games with his 2nd grade peers at the DC Baha'i Center, including one in which students were asked to determine if some scenarios were just or unjust. "There was no right or wrong answer," said Bastion, adding that he enjoyed hearing different points of view from his classmates. GDS chose to partner with the center because the Baha'i faith is not studied in the 2nd grade's religion and spirituality unit, and its core tenets are peace, justice, unity, and service–in line with GDS's mission.

As the students prepared to leave, they could take home one of three stickers as a parting gift. Bastion chose one that read: "Ye are the fruit of one tree and the leaf of one branch."

"I liked the words, and I felt they were important to me," Bastion said. "To me, it means, we are all similar in many ways."



Ryan Libby '26 (top photo, upper left) and Nate Ridl '26 (bottom) work with students to assemble LEGO robotics kits.



LENDING A HAND IN BRAZIL

FIVE GDS STUDENTS REACH BRAZILIAN VILLAGE TO TEACH ROBOTICS



Brazilian students in Povoado Crasto walking to a robotics class led by GDS students.

WHEN AN OPPORTUNITY AROSE to teach robotics to teenagers in Brazil, Oliver Thomas '24 did not hesitate. He and four of his GDS peers stuffed six Lego robotics kits into their suitcases and took off for Povoado Crasto, an underserved coastal community in northeastern Brazil.

The week-long trip in August was months in the making. Oliver, whose mother is Brazilian, made contact through family connections with a nonprofit that works in the state of Sergipe, where Crasto is located. The nonprofit—Instituto de Pesquisas em Tecnologia e Inovação (IPTI)—works to create self-sustaining communities in remote areas of Brazil, in part by providing technology training to teenage students who can take the skills back to their villages.

IPTI's mission appealed to Oliver, who joined the GDS robotics team as a freshman and always wanted to generate excitement for the STEM field, particularly robotics. So why not head to a secluded village in Brazil and spread the love there?

Ryan Libby '26, Eric Liu '26, Nate Ridl '26, and Nora Schrag '25 were all in. To them, the idea did not seem farfetched when Oliver pitched it. "At GDS, we're surrounded by people who do amazing things," Ryan said. "So it didn't seem scary to do something like this."

The group recalled how Ava Blum '23 and Clio Blum '25 took a trip to Poland with their family in 2022 to help refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine and the time Hudson Reynolds '25 and his father climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in 2023 to raise money for research on Phenylketonuria (PKU), a genetic disorder.



Brazilian students listen to a presentation about Washington, DC



Ryan Libby '26 (left foreground), Oliver Thomas '24, and their schoolmates took a slow boat to Povoado Crasto with their LEGO robotics kits.

"The GDS community encourages students to go out in the world and help others," Oliver said. "We're in a school environment where it's not crazy to say: 'Hey, let's go to Brazil and teach robotics.'"

The group initially explored the idea of setting up a competitive robotics team at a community center run by IPTI. But they quickly realized that doing so would be expensive, unsustainable, and impractical in the limited time they had. They decided instead to hold an introductory robotics course, using the Lego kits as hands-on learning tools. (The trip was funded privately, not by GDS.)

GDS robotics team members who could not join the trip prepared two slide shows, one about their involvement in a DC-area robotics competition and the other about how to block code using the Lego software, which would be left behind for future students to use. Oliver prepared his own presentation about life in the nation's capital to give the Brazilian students a taste of DC.

A few days into their trip, after attending IPTI informational sessions and touring local farming and fishing villages with the group's leaders, the GDS students finally got to roll out their course at the nonprofit's community center in Crasto. It took them an hour—by boat—to get there from their hotel (the nearest they could find).

LEARN TO CHANGE THE WORLD

The ride was worth it. For three days, the group met with locals, ages 13 to 17, to discuss robotics, sensors, coding, and life in Washington, DC, a topic of intrigue for the local teens. The GDS students also spent some time training "reappliers," young adults associated with IPTI who would be tasked with carrying on the work that the GDS students started. Oliver, a fluent Portuguese speaker, and his mother served as translators.

"But we still went on our phones to use Google translate to talk to each other," Nate said. "The most fun part for me was being around [the local students] and making a personal connection. They had lots of questions about American culture, and they spent a lot of time talking to me and Eric about [soccer]. … Lots of them actually follow us on Instagram now, and I talked to a couple of them recently. I genuinely think everyone had a lot of fun."

Ryan said she was unsure how the local teens would handle receiving instruction from students of a similar age. But she found that they were all eager to learn and took seriously the coding and robot-building projects that they undertook in groups. "They were super interested and curious," Ryan added. "I made the wrong assumptions and that was part of my learning."

The teaching stint ended with a robotics competition that had each team displaying the robot they built using their respective kits and explaining how the relevant parts and sensors worked. Candy and solar-powered car kits were among the prizes. "We had many different categories for awards, like for aesthetics, best coding, best teamwork," Oliver said. "Every team walked away with something. Everyone was a winner."



Prepping for robotics competition



Nayada Pavli-Stock '30 codes in Makeblock coding platform.

REAPING THE BENEFITS OF ROBOTICS



MS Hopper Robotics team at the *FIRST* LEGO League competition with their robot.

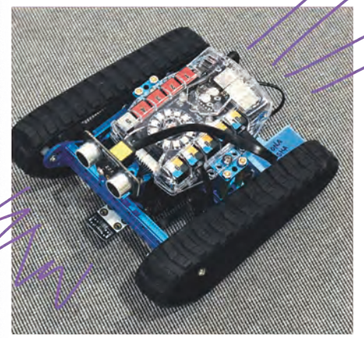
A LIST OF GLARING AND STUBBORN TRENDS

helps explain the push to ramp up interest in robotics at the Middle School among boys *and* girls.

The number of jobs in the STEM field is growing (twice as fast as non-STEM jobs!), but the supply of workers is not keeping up with demand, federal data shows. And although women make up nearly half of the U.S. workforce, they hold only about a third of STEM jobs and roughly a quarter (if that) of computing and engineering jobs, the Pew Research Center reported.

But there's a bright spot: Nearly 70 percent of growth in the computing pipeline could come from changing the path of the youngest girls–especially those in middle school, where exposure to the STEM field can greatly influence their choice of high school and college studies as well as their careers, according to Accenture and the nonprofit Girls Who Code.

With that in mind, the Middle School innovation team is using robotics as a jumping-off point for developing a broader interest in STEM among younger students and exposing those students to the ways in which technology can improve lives and solve complex problems.





(clockwise from left) Anya Genetski '30, Nayada Pavli-Stock '30, Alexandra Fahrenthold '30, Sasha Pierce '30, and Fiona Rising '30 code instructions for their mBot Ranger (left)

GIRLS JUST WANNA CODE

For two years, LMS School Innovation and Computer Science Teacher Gwen Hicks has offered a coding club for 5th and 6th grade girls. The goal, she said, goes beyond coding. Gwen wants the students to engage in problem-solving, which is why she recently purchased four robot-making kits for her most recent club using funds from Girls Who Code. The students can now use the code they've written to direct the robots to complete tasks.

During a recent club meeting, Nayada Pavli-Stock '30 and Alexandra Fahrenthold '30 puzzled over whether their robot was malfunctioning because of a hardware issue or a coding problem.

"You have to try multiple times to get it right," Nayada said. "It's really not easy, but it's still fun."

Alexandra said that coding encourages tenacity. "It causes you to troubleshoot, learn to persevere through your mistakes, and learn that you can do anything if you put your mind to it," Alexandra said. "Also, I think it's cool to be part of this club because girls have been left out of tech and coding stuff for a long time."

NEW MS HOPPER ROBOTICS JOINS THE ACTION

Similar opportunities opened up for another 10 MS students in November when the new Hopper Robotics club entered its first-ever robotics competition with a robot made of Legos. The team of 7th and 8th graders was one of several DC-area groups at Alexandria's Hayfield Secondary School for the *FIRST* LEGO League, a globally recognized robotics competition designed to inspire critical thinking, coding, and design skills through hands-on learning.

"They had to build a robot, program it, and decide which tasks the robot should perform in order to get the most points in the least amount of time," said Gwen, who helped coach the students. "But it's not just about what you build. It's about the presentation and how you act. Are you kind to people? Are you helpful? Do you have good sportsmanship?"

Hopper Robotics knocked it out of the park on that front and walked away with the "Core Values" award, a key component of the scoring system. The values include "Gracious Professionalism," defined as exploring new skills and ideas, solving problems in creative ways with an eye toward improving the world, and respecting others. "Coopertition"—the idea that teams can help each other even as they compete—also figures prominently in the core values scoring.

Another scoring component involved having each team take on an innovative project tied to the broader theme of the competition: finding new ways to communicate art across the globe. Hopper Robotics focused on how to make drawing more interesting, and the students created an electronic survey that was circulated among their GDS peers to dig deeper into that question.

"We found that some people have short attention spans," said Marika Light '29. "They want to see the process, but they don't want to watch for a long time."

The team decided that stop motion animation, a flip-book style animation that captures a process frame by frame, was the solution. Every student contributed to the presentation and participated in writing slides.

Gwen said she noticed the team evolve in the weeks leading up to the competition in terms of their organizational and collaborative skills. "By the end, I was watching them really work together," Gwen said. "They took ownership and they really led it."



Jenny Abramson '95 created Hopper Tank three years ago in honor of her mother Patty.

HOPPER TANK WINNERS SNAG $1K PRIZE

TEAMS OF GDS STUDENTS PITCH BUSINESSES THAT DO GOOD IN THE WORLD



Hopper Tank champions (left to right) Rhea Ganta '27, Alicia Kim '27, Arielle Stopak '27, and Willa Wible '27 of Purple Pack

AT THE THIRD ANNUAL GDS HOPPER TANK COMPETITION, a team of freshmen students walked away with a $1,000 grant to help launch a business that would provide self-care packages for women experiencing homelessness.

The winners—Willa Wible '27, Alicia Kim '27, Arielle Stopak '27, and Rhea Ganta '27—plan to supply basic necessities, such as shampoo and menstrual products, to women in need. They came up with their "Purple Pack" initiative after contacting several shelters and learning that most women there couldn't afford toiletries that the average person often takes for granted.

"This is something we are very passionate about, so we rehearsed our pitch a lot, and we were confident going into the competition," Arielle said. "It was such a fun and valuable experience."

The *Shark Tank*-style competition marks the culmination of an extracurricular project supported by the Patty Abramson Social Venture Lab. The Lab was created by Jenny Abramson '95 in honor of her mother, a former GDS Trustee and venture capitalist who gained national recognition for investing exclusively in women-owned businesses.

Each of the five participating teams was tasked with developing a financially sustainable, scalable start-up that tackles a social problem. For 12 weeks, the teams crafted their business plans before pitching their ideas at a March assembly to the Middle School students, who selected a winner by casting gold coins or "Patty Bucks" for their team of choice.

Jenny, a GDS parent and former Board Chair, said that her mother would have been thrilled to see the effort and thought that students invested in the contest. "This brings together my mom's passions for entrepreneurship, for GDS, and for making a social impact in the world," said Jenny. "She would have loved it."



The Hopper Tank judges (aka Middle School students) listen intently



Hopper Tank co-leaders Laila Bapna '25 (left) and Grace Zia '25 (right) with Nora Sachse '25, head of the Hopper Tank Advisory Board, consisting of student coaches. Director of HS Admissions Amanda Deringer (not pictured) served as the faculty adviser.

The students developed their business models and learned how to pitch their ideas to an audience with support from GDS-connected business leaders, including Abby Schneiderman '98, Otey Smith, Les Silverman, and Wendee Wolfson. Former Hopper Tank participants acted as coaches and organizers. Laila Bapna '25 and Grace Zia '25, winners from previous years, co-led the event. "This competition is unlike any other opportunity we have at School," Laila said.

In addition to Purple Pack, the MS audience heard about an app that would connect young people facing mental health issues with others who have overcome similar challenges; a language study program for immigrants; an effort to sell excess high school sports jerseys and donate the proceeds to a group that distributes sports equipment to those who can't afford it; and a venture that would donate unused hotel toiletry products and linens to people in need.

When Purple Pack emerged victorious, the group got to work. The team has already invested in developing a website. "Soon, we'll start marketing and reaching out for donations from [toiletry product] companies," said Willa. "Some of the money will be put into the first 30 care packages to test our model."

Her teammate Alicia hopes the supplies will go beyond serving the practical needs of the women served. "We all know that self-care boosts our confidence and makes us feel better," Alicia said. "We wanted to create something that would help women in many ways."

Jenny said she's heartened by student interest in this program. Nearly 20 students competed in this year's Hopper Tank, up from four in the 2021-22 school year.

"It's great to see how the enthusiasm is spilling into the Middle School," said Jenny, founder of Rethink Impact, a venture capital firm that backs women and non-binary leaders. "And it's inspiring to see the range of issues students want to solve."

BRINGING IDEAS TO LIFE

Past Hopper Tank winners are gaining traction on their businesses, and other participants are committed to bringing their ideas to fruition.

→ **Laila Bapna '25,** winner of the first competition in 2021, has launched a password-protected website that's being tested by 15 users for School Buddies, a business designed to help DC-area refugees acclimate to school life.

↗ **Grace Zia '25,** a member of last year's winning team, said that her team is starting to reach out to potential partners. Their venture, Fruitful Connection, is an online platform that connects soup kitchens and social service groups with restaurants and food providers that have leftover food.

↗ **All 2024 Hopper Tank** participants decided to continue working on their businesses–prize or no prize–during their "community time" this academic year. Oliver Malkin '26, one of this year's coaches, helped organize them.



GDS seniors fend off fans as the guest of honor makes the rounds.

CORY ROYSTER

VIP(S) IN THE HOUSE



KAI PARK '27

Out with the old (left), and in with the new.

THE NEW GDS HOPPER MASCOT received a rock star's welcome at a raucous outdoor unveiling ceremony in September. Security guards (aka Community Leadership Corps seniors) kept the paparazzi and screaming fans at bay as the Hopper arrived on campus in a Black SUV motorcade and proceeded to the Lower/Middle School field for a swearing-in ceremony. Other VIPs in attendance: the GDS leadership donning judicial robes, students from every division of the School, and celebrated local mascots, who welcomed the new Hopper into their fold, including Screech and Teddy from the Nationals, American University's Clawed Z. Eagle, George Washington University's Colonial, Georgetown University's Jack the Bulldog, Howard University's Bison, the Frog from Maret School, and the Fox from Sidwell Friends School. DC Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie (a GDS parent) presided over the swearing-in ceremony. The surprise unveiling took place at the All-School Spirit Assembly that traditionally happens on the last Friday of September.



DC Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie, a GDS parent, swears in the new Hopper mascot.



DC area mascots welcome their newest GDS peer.

CLAIRE SIMON '24





Russell Shaw and Meg Goldner Rabinowitz join the festivities.



CORY ROYSTER



GROWN UP'S NIGHT OUT TAKES FLIGHT

GDS LAUNCHED "GROWN UP'S NIGHT OUT" in March to show parents and faculty a good time and allow them to connect with each other—without the kids in tow. Roughly 300 adults from the School's three divisions gathered for the "Take Flight" soirée at the LMS gym, which was set up to resemble an airport lounge, stocked with 17 wines from various countries, including France, Italy, Spain, South Africa, Chile, and Portugal. "We wanted an opportunity for parents to let their hair down and engage with each other in a fun and casual environment," said Joyce DePass, Director of Community Relations and the brains behind this outing.

We are grateful to GDS parent Diane Gross, owner of Cork Wine Bar and Market, for selecting the wines and recruiting four fabulous wine distributors for the event: Potomac Selections, Vintage '59, Elite Wines, and Downey Selections. Each distributor poured glasses at their respective "gates" and educated party-goers about the wines, their flavor profiles, and ideal pairings. Alex Buc and the superb team from Meriwether Godsey took charge of the food. Meanwhile, Stephanie Mathias (aka Stephanie Strings) strolled through the crowd playing her electric violin before capping off the evening with a performance. A huge "thank you" to everyone involved in making this inaugural event a success—including the 23 parents who served on the host committee and helped get word out about the event.



About 300 GDS parents and staff attended the inaugural Grown Up's Night Out.







Geoffrey Bailey talks up Potomac Selection's wines.



"WE WANTED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PARENTS TO LET THEIR HAIR DOWN..." JOYCE DEPASS



Electric violinist Stephanie Mathias (aka Stephanie Strings) provided the night's entertainment.



Host committee members (from left to right with badges) Des Bouadi, Ateesha Lacoste, and Nicole Lewis Tyson join their friends at Grown Up's Night Out.





KAI PARK '27



SOSI AUDAIN



ALEXANDRA GIANINNO

COMMUNITY FLOCKS TO COUNTRY MARKET DAY



AARIONNA GOODMAN

STRONG WINDS did not deter the 1,000+ people who showed up for Country Market Day, the School's annual fall festival. The five-hour event–open to GDS families and the Tenleytown community–offered rides, games, student-led entertainment, food trucks, a very popular Haunted House, flag football, an enticing sweet shop with home-baked treats, and stalls for area vendors and our HS student groups. The festival's well-stocked signature book sale also featured storytelling time with some of our favorite GDS administrators and teachers. "It's a heavy lift and parents have a huge role in making this event a success," said GDS Director of Community Relations Joyce DePass. A big thank you to GDS Country Market Day co-chairs Des Bouadi and William Fastow for their time, effort, and planning prowess.



AARIONNA GOODMAN



ALEXANDRA GIANINNO





CARTER KUNZ '26





ALEXANDRA GIANINNO





CARTER KUNZ '26

AARIONNA GOODMAN



(from left) Mateo '37, Christopher '32, Thad '37, and Niam '32 paraded around the LS field together.



MACKINZIE BISACCIA

HS Principal Yom Fox and Head of School Russell Shaw.

JUST KEN & FRIENDS

ENERGIZED BY CHEERS AND HIGH-FIVES, students showcased their Halloween costumes on the LMS field joined by their peers and the broader GDS community. Head of School Russell Shaw and HS Principal Yom Fox (left) made for a persuasive Ken and Barbie as they struck a pose inside the iconic pink doll box. Barbie pink was ubiquitous as students paraded around the field, some of them with signs identifying their grade and class. The spooky and the silly showed up in force–all with huge smiles on their faces.



(clockwise) Kihika Hyera '26, Eli Stein '27, Tristan Souchaud '27, and William Cromer '27





Stylin' sixth grader Max Perl '30



Adam '35, our friendly neighborhood Spider Man



The Bias Busters: DEI team Marlo Thomas, Shakeara Pardner, and Guyton Mathews (left to right)





GDS parent Rachel Vogelstein, the Senior Advisor to the White House Gender Policy Council, speaks to students at the White House. (Left) The group poses in front of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

LEARNING FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE AISLE

Students hit the K Street corridor.



THE 8TH GRADERS took off for Hill Day in February. They interviewed lawmakers and policy experts from both sides of the aisle on high-profile issues–everything from Second Amendment rights to immigration to reproductive justice. HS students who had previously participated in Hill Day helped their younger peers prep for the meetings, which were organized by the Community Engagement and Experiential Learning (CEEL) office.



The 8th grade gathers before fanning out across the city for meetings.



CONSENT SUMMIT DRAWS A CROWD

Signs made by some of the 90+ GDS student organizers





Annabel Hilzenrath '24, one of four Summit student leaders, delivers opening remarks.

THE 8TH ANNUAL GDS SUMMIT on Sexual Assault and Consent drew more than 430 attendees to campus in November, marking the largest turnout in the summit's history. The two-day event examined current laws, policies, and programs that support survivors and prevent sexual assault. This year, the summit included a Take Back the Night march around the HS field and featured intersex advocate Alicia Weigel as the keynote speaker. Students, faculty, and parents from schools across the nation participated in the event, which is organized by GDS students who want similar discourse to take place in other schools.

(from left) Cecelia Dyson '24, Lismeyri Encarnacion Ruiz '24, Maya Cruz-Hubbard '24, Morgan Pearson '24, Jocelyn Torres '24

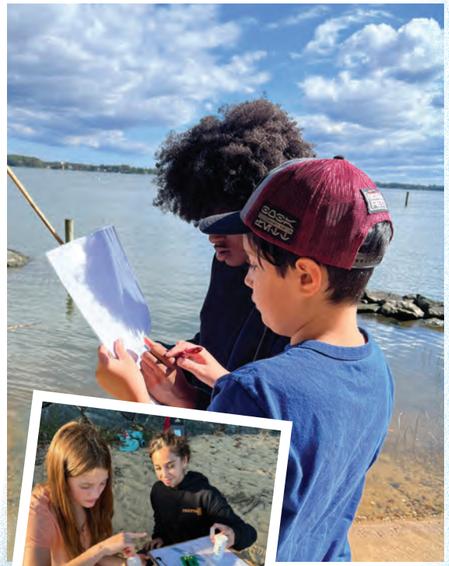








The 7th grade gathered for a group photograph in front of the camp's Bay Center meeting space.



CANOEING, CLIMBING,



THE 6TH AND 7TH GRADERS headed to Sandy Hill Camp and Retreat Center in Maryland's Cecil County for their respective class overnight trips in October. The students tested their mettle and collaborative skills while climbing towers, riding zip lines, and doing rope courses. The camp, which overlooks the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay, gave everyone the chance to go canoeing when they weren't engaged in a host of other activities. The 7th graders took the opportunity to test the bay's water quality for their ecology unit, which culminated in a podcast about their research. "I enjoyed every part of visiting Sandy Hill," said Aliana Cromer '29.













The 6th grade at the Sandy Hill Camp's Lighthouse Center meeting space.

AND CAMARADERIE









CARTER KUNZ '26



CARTER KUNZ '26



FREED PHOTOGRAPHY



BRING ON THE GAMES

IN KEEPING WITH THE FIRST FRIDAY TRADITION, the High School suspended classes for a day to celebrate the end of the first week of School with a barbecue and some good-spirited games involving students and faculty.



FREED PHOTOGRAPHY



CARTER KUNZ '26



FREED PHOTOGRAPHY



FREED PHOTOGRAPHY



CARTER KUNZ '26



CARTER KUNZ '26



CARTER KUNZ '26



CARTER KUNZ '26





FREED PHOTOGRAPHY





Angelic voices filled the room during the 2023 LS peace assemblies.

A SEASON OF CELEBRATIONS

GDS'S CORE VALUES of racial and religious inclusivity are represented by its embrace of the holidays and traditions of its community members. In the first half of the school year, students held peace assemblies to celebrate Christmas, decorated and danced to commemorate the Chinese New Year, and honored Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s commitment to improving the lives of others with an assembly and volunteer opportunities during the January holiday that commemorates the civil rights leader. In April, LMS students told the story of Passover during the LS assembly.





For the LS Passover Assembly, students told the story of Passover (locust plague included) through song and dance and while seated around a seder table.



First graders sang songs of protest and performed poetry for the MLK Justice Assembly.



GDS volunteers make sandwiches at DC Central Kitchen, one of the many volunteer service opportunities arranged by the PSA to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and legacy.

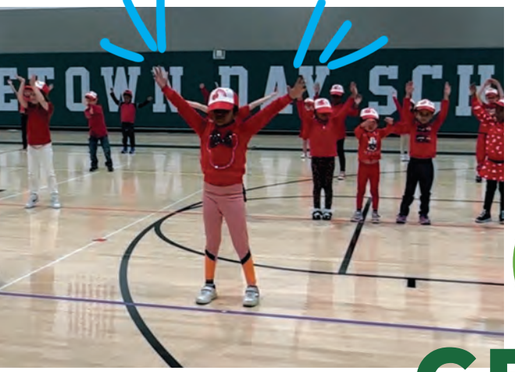


The Lower School kicked off the Lunar New Year celebration with an assembly in January featuring the Choy Wun Lion Dance Troupe.

HS students in Min Wong's Chinese class learned Chinese calligraphy.

The GDS Triple A affinity group decorated the HS library for the Lunar New Year.











GDS GETS UP AND DANCES

LOWER SCHOOL STUDENTS brought the house down in early February during the annual dance assembly held by the LS Physical Education Department. The show was a month in the making, and students came up with some of their own moves for the choreography. Parents took to the floor for the last dance, joining in for the "Cha Cha Slide," a glorious ending to an energized performance.









For Day Hiking in the DMV, students visited the U.S. National Arboretum (above), stopped by the historic Mount Bleak House at Sky Meadows State Park, and hiked to the top of Annapolis Rock and Black Rock, where Winnie Penniman '26 posed for photo (right).



HS English teacher Nina Prytula and Quinn Magnell '26 decorate pysanky, the Ukrainian Easter eggs famous for their intricate designs and vibrant colors.



MINIMESTER:

THREE DAYS, THREE DOZEN COURSES



Audrey Leff '25 tends the fire at Ashland Nature Center as part of the Wilderness Roots – A Native Landscaping Camping Adventure.

THE ANNUAL "MINIMESTER" TRADITION is a three-day pause in the usual High School schedule during which students can pick and choose from more than three dozen immersive experiences curated and led by faculty and staff with input and suggestions from students. The theme of each offering is based on the interests and talents of the individuals who lead them. Every course is full of experiential activities, including trips off-campus. For "3 Plays in 3 Days in 3 Cities," students saw the Lantern Company's production of Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* in Philadelphia, Larissa FastHorse's new adaptation of *Peter Pan* in Baltimore, and the premiere of Vivian J.O. Barnes' *The Sensational Sea Mink-ettes* at Woolly Mammoth in DC. Other offerings include old favorites (such as "Traditional Ukrainian Easter Egg Decorating") and new gems (such as "Wilderness Roots: A Native Landscaping Camping Adventure").



Students visited the Rothko exhibit and the DorothyTrapper Goldman Gallery among others at the Smithsonian American Art Museum as part of the Art Behind the Scenes trip.



Students saw plays in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, and also visited the National Gallery of Art as part of their 3 Plays in 3 Days In 3 Cities excursion. Pictured above are students at Woolly Mammoth Theatre.



NYT JOURNALIST ANDREA ELLIOTT '91 SPEAKS AT BENJAMIN COOPER LECTURE SERIES



Head of School Russell Shaw and Andrea Elliott '91

TWO-TIME PULITZER PRIZE WINNER Andrea Elliott '91 spoke about child poverty in America at the 26th Annual Benjamin Cooper Memorial Lecture in November. Andrea, a *New York Times* journalist, discussed the story of Dasani Coates, who was the subject of Andrea's Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Invisible Child: Poverty, Survival & Hope in an American City*. The Benjamin Cooper Memorial Lecture series was established in memory of Ben by some of his close GDS friends. Ben was a rising senior at GDS when he was killed in a tragic accident on August 12, 1997. The Lecture Fund, endowed by the Cooper-Areen family, enables GDS to bring renowned guest lecturers, such as Andrea, to the School each year to stimulate the kind of dialogue in which Ben loved to participate. Andrea spoke at an evening event in the LMS Flexible Performance Space and then at a High School morning assembly.

LEAVE A *Legacy* AT GDS

WHAT IS LEGACY GIVING?

LEGACY GIVING IS A LIFELINE TO OUR FUTURE.

Legacy giving, sometimes called planned giving, is a type of philanthropy in which donors create gifts for nonprofits as part of their estate plans. These gifts are made through wills, trusts, and other vehicles.

By establishing a legacy gift, you join the Gladys Stern Legacy Society, named after our third Head of School, who retired in 1996—after 42 years of service to GDS, 21 of them at the helm. Gladys was the longest-serving head of a local independent school. She shepherded the construction of our High School building at 4200 Davenport Street, NW through development, an endeavor that took several years. Through this and other accomplishments, she worked tirelessly to secure our school's position. *Your donation honors Gladys and serves as an investment in our future.*

GLADYS STERN LEGACY SOCIETY MEMBERS

ANONYMOUS
JENNY ABRAMSON AND JACOB MAAS
CIERA AND TREVOR ASHLEY
JEFFREY DELOZIER
LAURA DICKINSON AND PAUL SCHIFF BERMAN
CYNTHIA DUNBAR AND CHARLIE CERF
ANDREA* AND JAMES HAMOS
LINDA JACKSON
LARRY KANAREK
ELIZABETH LEWIS AND DAVID FAHRENTHOLD
JUDITH AND ELLIOTT LICHTMAN
JACLIN AND DAVID MARLIN
BETSY MCISAAC*
SUSAN SCHAFFER AND MICHAEL ROGAN
LAURA STONE AND EZRA LEVINE
SUSAN TANNENBAUM AND DAVID OSTERHOUT*

**deceased*

IF YOU HAVE MADE A COMMITMENT TO GDS IN YOUR ESTATE PLANS, PLEASE LET US KNOW SO THAT WE CAN CELEBRATE YOUR GIFT IN YOUR LIFETIME AND LIST YOU AS A MEMBER OF THE GLADYS STERN LEGACY SOCIETY.

GLADYS STERN *Legacy* SOCIETY

LEARN MORE ABOUT LEGACY GIVING

We can help you find the best way to support the next generation of GDS students, and perhaps help you make a larger gift than you ever thought possible. **Please contact Director of Development Jeffrey Delozier at jdelozier@gds.org or 202-295-6239.**



PHOTOS BY PAUL HIGDAY

(From left) Clara Yu '24 holding her DCSAA Championship Tournament MVP Award as Jocelyn Torres '24 and Aaliyah Howell '24 hoist the championship trophy.

GDS VOLLEYBALL WINS SECOND CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE



Jada Aksu '25 skies high for a thunderous kill!

FAN ATTENDANCE SWELLS

THE GDS WOMEN'S VARSITY VOLLEYBALL TEAM crushed Jackson-Reed's Tigers in a three-set sweep, securing a second consecutive DC State Athletic Association (DCSAA) championship in November and firing up its reliably adoring fan base along the way.

The Hoppers showed up with confidence to win each set by a decisive margin: 25-11, 25-18, and 25-12, respectively. The team was both physically and mentally prepared to take on their opponents, said Head Coach Brandon Wiest, who was recently named DCSAA's Coach of the Year, adding to the many honors he has received for his work at GDS.

"We had a good idea of what Jackson-Reed's game plan would be going into the championship, and we knew that if we served aggressively, it would make it tough for them to do what they wanted to do," Brandon said. "We were in a good headspace. Everything clicked, and we served them off the court. All of us are very grateful for a big win and big support in the stands."

The rivalry between the two teams, located just blocks away from one another, dates back years. It heated up in 2021 when the Hoppers played Jackson-Reed (formerly Wilson) in GDS's first-ever DCSAA volleyball championship game–only to lose in a nail-biter, five-set match before an overflow crowd. The following year, GDS beat St. John's to clinch its first DCSAA title. The Hoppers were determined to win their second when they arrived at Howard University's Burr Gymnasium in November for yet another showdown with the Tigers.

"Going into that game, I was thinking: 'Yes, this is a rematch. But we're also new teams, and we have to play in the moment,'" said Zoe Ryu '25, an outside hitter. "I knew we had to play our best, and we did. It felt so good to beat them."

The victory felt more urgent for the team's seniors. "There was pressure because how cool would it be to win two in a row before graduating," said setter Clara Yu '24, who was named tournament MVP and later selected as Gatorade District of Columbia Volleyball Player of the Year. "But the pressure was lifted once we got on the court. We came together as a team, and the fan support was awesome. I saw some of my teachers doing the wave with my parents and friends."

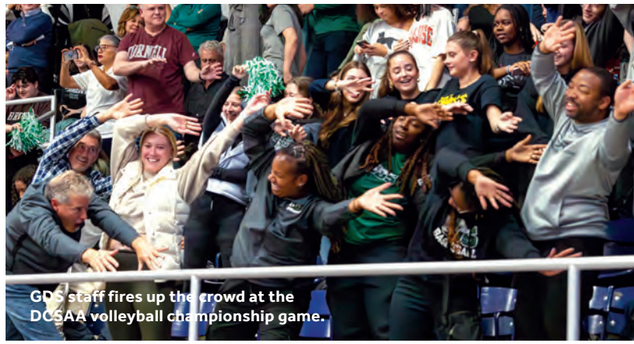
FROM "OKAY" TO POWERHOUSE

The team's fan base grew in tandem with the athletes' increased commitment to the sport.

In 2015, when Brandon came to GDS as the varsity team's assistant coach, only a smattering of spectators showed up for games and only a few of the girls played club volleyball during the off season. But the few who did enticed others to do the same.

"A similar pattern emerged over the next several years, and our coaches started spending more time at coaching conventions and clinics," said Brandon, who took over as head coach in 2016 with Omar Visurraga as assistant coach. (More recently, Amber Matalus joined the coaching staff.) When a new crew of freshman players joined the team in 2018, many of them with club volleyball experience, the team's performance improved dramatically. "We went from being an okay team to one that made it to the first championship game," Brandon said. "We've sustained success ever since."

In each of the past two years, close to 50 students tried out for the Varsity and JV teams combined, more than double the number in 2016. Meanwhile, attendance swelled at the games. Alexa Gillespie '25 remembers her 6th-grade-self watching her sister Emma Gillespie '22 play volleyball as a freshman, just before that varsity team gained steam. "It used to be the parents and me watching," said Alexa, a current varsity volleyball player. "Now, the stands are packed, and it's super loud, and we can barely hear each other. It's very cool."



GDS staff fires up the crowd at the DCSAA volleyball championship game.

FORGING SWEET MEMORIES

Aaliyah Howell '24, a team captain and an outside hitter, said that she's learned to appreciate more than just the victories. In fact, one of her favorite games was the one that GDS lost to Jackson-Reed in 2021–a sentiment expressed by many of her teammates. The roar of the crowd. The fierce competition. The adrenaline rush. She says she'll never forget any of it.

"We fought hard in that game and gave it our all. I realize that's what matters, the effort we put in," said Aaliyah, who was selected for the DCSAA's 2024 all-state volleyball team along with teammates Clara, Zoe, Jada Aksu '25, and Shiraz Benyoucef '25.

"Volleyball taught me how to experience losses and how to persevere," Aaliyah added. "I don't look at things as win or lose anymore, and that's transferred to other parts of my life. …Even with school work, I learned that the results depend on the effort that went into it."

Clara, also a team captain and DCSAA Player of the Year, has come to appreciate the community-building aspects of the game. Clara said that when she starts to feel sad that this chapter of her life is coming to a close, she takes comfort in knowing that the bonds made with her teammates will continue, as demonstrated by the large turnout of former GDS volleyball players for a recent alumni game.

"It shows the love we all have for this game and this school," Clara said. "I'm graduating, but what I'll be able to take with me from this program is the community and connection that we've formed. That's the sweet part, the part I'll remember most."



Madi Moore-Nicholson '24, sole senior on the Varsity Women's Basketball team, cuts down the net after the championship win.

DCSAA CHAMPIONSHIP WINS FOR WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

A REPEAT FOR HS, A FIRST FOR MS

THE GDS WOMEN'S BASKETBALL PROGRAM capped a stellar season with championship wins in March for both the Varsity and Middle School teams at the District of Columbia State Athletic Association (DCSAA) competition, where both teams cheered each other on as they played in the same arena on the same day.

The varsity team beat the Jackson-Reed Tigers 61-43 to win the DCSAA Class A Championship. The victory at George Washington University's Charles E. Smith Athletic Center marked the team's second state title in three years, with the previous one being in 2022.

As for the Middle School team, it made history by winning the first-ever DCSAA middle school state championship. (Previously, the competition included only high school teams.) The Hoppers rose to the occasion, defeating Alice Deal 37-30 in a nail-biter of a game.

"For both the High School and Middle School teams, we met with each player about their goals for themselves and for their team so that they were very focused on what they needed to do going into the season," said Associate Athletic Director Pam Stanfield, head coach of the varsity team and an assistant coach for the MS players. "I really appreciate the commitment they had to working hard and reaching their goals. That's why we had such a successful season."

TALENT AND "CHEMISTRY" FUEL VARSITY TEAM'S WIN

Pam said the varsity players established a chemistry during the off-season, bonding during team workouts, team camps, and an unofficial fall league that was organized and coached by the students. "That chemistry helped them stay connected during the entire season, all the way through the championship game," said Pam, who worked with assistant coaches Khalid Bashir (Assistant Principal for Academics) and Amy Heinzelman (HS Physical Education teacher.)

Evelyn Chen '25 said she's been playing basketball since she was a kid, and this past season was her favorite because she felt very connected to her teammates as they collectively chased after the same goal: another championship win. The effort that the players put in before the season started kept going and gained momentum as the season took off, she said.



The Women's Varsity Basketball team, winners of the 2024 DCSAA Class A Championship.



The Middle School team won the first-ever DCSAA middle school state championship

"I can't count how many hours we put in after school, during our lunch breaks, and on Saturdays," Evelyn said. "All of that led us to the championship game. We started strong against Jackson-Reed and we just kept pushing."

Madi Moore-Nicholson '24, who was named the game's MVP, had a double-double, scoring 23 points and pulling down 12 rebounds. Nevaeh Roberson '27 also had a double-double with 12 points and 13 rebounds, while Cai Roberson '26 pitched in with 14 points and seven rebounds.

Madi said she felt relatively calm during the game. "We started off really well, and I remember looking at the scoreboard and realizing we were up 15, and we weren't slowing down," Madi said. "We were on the right path to win for the entire game."

A week prior to the championship victory, GDS lost a game to Holton-Arms in the semi-finals of the Independent School Leagues (ISL) tournament, which pushed the team to double down in their practices, Madi said. "We had a very tough practice the next Saturday," she added. "We knew we didn't want to feel that disappointment again, so we worked even harder. We really came together and played one of our best games overall to end the season."

Pam credits the team's cohesiveness in large part to Madi, the sole senior on the team, who acted as a reliable mentor to the younger players. Madi said that she hopes she had a positive effect on her teammates. "I wanted them to know that I was there for them, for basketball and for school or anything else," Madi said.

MS TEAM PLAYED WITH "ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM"

During their championship game, the Middle School team was four points behind Alice-Deal coming into halftime, which Head Coach Garrett Milam, attributed to nerves. "The nerves came from knowing that they were playing a big game on a big stage against a big-name team with good athletes," said Garrett, who is also a Lower School PE teacher. "I reassured them that they were just as good, if not better. I told them: 'Trust yourself and trust your abilities.' Once they were back on the court, they played with energy and enthusiasm, and they were executing everything that we worked on at a very high level."

For the two weeks leading up to the game, the team was on the court every day except Wednesday. They also snatched every bit of free time they had during the school day to practice, including recess. "That's a hard ask of a middle schooler," Garrett said. "But I didn't get any pushback."

During the championship game, GDS was led by 8th graders Iris Leonard and Jozi McDuffie. Iris, who won tournament MVP, scored 17 points–the most of any player. Jozi added 15 points, eight rebounds, and four assists. She was later selected to play in the first-ever DCSAA Middle School Girls All-Star game, where she was honored as MVP after scoring 30 points and making nine assists.

Jozi said the team stuck together at the championship even though they were down for most of the game. "The game was a lot of pressure, and it was really close," she said. "But we listened to our coaches. When we were neck and neck, they told us to stay composed and not get nervous. We were all ready to do whatever it took to pull out the win, so we listened and got the outcome we wanted."

Helping boost player morale, Jozi added, was seeing the varsity players rooting for them on the sidelines.



Jozi McDuffie '28 accepts championship trophy.



Swimmer Adriano Arioti '24 and Volleyball Player Clara Yu '24 at a GDS signing ceremony for future college athletes.

DEREK BRUNN

CORY ROYSTER

STAND-OUT STARS

THEIR KEY TO SUCCESS? EFFORT & DETERMINATION

ADRIANO ARIOTI AND CLARA YU SHARE MUCH IN COMMON: stellar athletic records, admission to Ivy League universities, teammates who adore them–and a car ride to school.

"It worked out perfectly since we both needed to carpool, and we live about five minutes from each other," said Clara, a star volleyball player. "A great friendship has sprouted, and I think that's because we're both committed to our sport and understand each other's work ethic."

Adriano, a powerhouse swimmer, typically puts in time at the pool before arriving at Clara's house. "Most of the time we may or may not sing in the car," Adriano said. "But don't ask Clara about that."

As Adriano and Clara prepare to take off for college and continue to dominate their sport (he at Harvard University and she to Columbia University) a recap of their athletic performance explains what they have achieved and why they stand out as all-stars at GDS.

ADRIANO ARIOTI
"I KEEP THINKING ABOUT WHAT I CAN DO BETTER."

Adriano's self-effacing nature may explain why he failed to mention during this interview that he has qualified for the 2024 U.S. Olympic trials in the 200-yard backstroke and 200-yard individual medley (IM), a race in which swimmers compete using all four competitive strokes.

But GDS Swim Coach Rick Bosland is happy to brag on Adriano's behalf. "Adriano never takes a swim off," Rick said. "I have coached kids who swim as hard as they need to swim to beat the competition, but they don't swim to their full potential. Adriano swims up to this potential every time he gets in the pool no matter who he is competing against. It's pretty extraordinary to watch."

Adriano, who has been swimming competitively since age 7, said he's always looking for ways to boost his time. "I love to improve, and I love to win," he said. "There's always some record to beat, so I keep thinking about what I can do better."

Adriano hit on a formula that worked well for him after the worst of the COVID pandemic had passed and swimmers were able to compete again. He started dolphin kicking his way underwater for a full 15 meters on his starts and flip turns, the maximum distance allowed in a race and a feat that few high school swimmers can accomplish, Rick said. His teammates and spectators marvel at how Adriano can sometimes break the surface of the water a full body length ahead of his most accomplished competitors. "I try to leverage that technique to my advantage because I'm a bit shorter than the other swimmers," said Adriano, who is 5 foot 10. "Swimming underwater is faster than over water."

The most recent testament to Adriano's talent came in early February at the Washington Metropolitan Interscholastic Swimming and Diving Championship, where he broke the 200-yard IM record by three seconds–an eternity in swimming–to finish at 1 minute 43.58 seconds. At that competition, which draws the top swimmers in the DC region, Arioti also won the 100-yard backstroke and received the Frank Martin Award for outstanding performance, an honor previously bestowed on Olympians Katie Ledecky, Phoebe Bacon, and Jack Conger.

Adriano's victories and record-setting swims are too many to mention in one article. But suffice it to say that the *Washington Post* recently described him as "one of the most accomplished D.C. area swimmers of the past decade." At GDS, he holds the record in all strokes and was a member of all the record-setting relay teams.

"He's probably the best swimmer I've ever seen, and it's hard to appreciate his skill if you haven't seen him in action," said GDS teammate Curan Palmer, who has been friends with Adriano since 5th grade.

But that's not all that people admire about him. Curan describes Adriano as a humble and "super joyous" guy who relishes meeting new people and always behaves in a kind and courteous manner. "He'll hold the door open for anyone he sees, even if they're 10 feet away and walking slowly," Curan says. "He's always looking out for other people."

CLARA YU
"THE PLAYER EVERYONE LOOKED UP TO"

One early January morning, Clara Yu got a notification from Instagram with a post of all the high school volleyball athletes selected as Gatorade's player of the year, one per state. And there was her name under the District of Columbia.

"It was a tremendous honor, but the most awesome part of it for me is the fact that I got a $1,000 community grant to donate," Clara said. "I chose to give it to Special Olympics DC because my uncle is intellectually disabled, and he used to participate in that program as a child. I wanted to give back to his community."

For 39 years, Gatorade has been honoring the nation's most elite high school athletes to celebrate their excellence on the court, in the classroom, and within their communities. In Yu, Gatorade's selection committee saw an accomplished scholar whose consistently stellar performance on the court also earned her many honors, including a spot on *The Washington Post's* 2023 Second Team All-Met and the Most Valuable Player trophy at the DCSAA title games for the past two years.

"Not many setters can back-set as well as Clara can, which was the key to the Hoppers' success," Jenna McGinn, assistant coach at the Flint Hill School, said in a statement to Gatorade. "She had full control of the court, and she is a very strong server as well."

What coaches and teammates say they particularly appreciate about Clara, who joined GDS her junior year, is her leadership style and unflappable nature.

"In addition to her athletic talent, Clara shines as a person," said Head Coach Brandon Wiest. "She's an energetic connector and culture-builder who puts time into building relationships with every single person on the team."

Her teammate and friend Shiraz Benyoucef '25 said Clara's leadership skills are not the type that can be taught. "She just has it," Shiraz said. "She came to the team and immediately became the player that everyone looked up to. She brings a very positive energy to the court, maybe because she always holds her head high and knows how to move past mistakes."

Shiraz remembers feeling down during practice once because she was making bad plays. She told Clara about it half an hour before practice ended. "Clara told me: 'You have 30 minutes to make it better.' I realized I had time to turn things around, and I did," Shiraz said. "She knows how to flip a switch in people and make them feel good."





János Szász (left) shooting *The Notebook* in 2012.

HS THEATER DIRECTOR JÁNOS SZÁSZ NOMINATED FOR HELEN HAYES AWARD

HUNGARIAN ÉMIGRÉ IS INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED FOR STAGE, FILM WORK

BY THE TIME HUNGARIAN ÉMIGRÉ JÁNOS SZÁSZ settled in the United States two years ago, he had directed about 30 stage shows and a dozen feature films–one that had won the European equivalent of the Oscar, one that was selected for the Cannes Film Festival, and one that was produced by none other than Steven Spielberg (yes, *that* Steven Spielberg.)

In fall 2023, János (pronounced ya-nosh) brought his wealth of talent and experience to GDS as the School's newest High School Theater Director. And he continued to gain recognition for his work. This year, he landed a Helen Hayes nomination for Outstanding Director of a Play for his revival of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America Part One: Millennium Approaches* at Arena Stage. *The Washington Post* praised János for doing "justice to all the emotional, dialectical and philosophical threads of the play," which shines a spotlight on the Reagan administration's failure to respond to the AIDS epidemic.

János, a Budapest native whose parents survived the Holocaust, said his work is informed by his Jewish heritage, his curiosity, and his willingness to take risks. "Any story, if it's film or theater, can be told in a thousand different ways, and telling that story is a journey," János said. "You never know if you will succeed or fail when you reach your final destination, if people will love it or hate it. I take risks, and it's important for students to take risks. … It's truly very important to have a place, or a laboratory, to make mistakes."

Here we highlight the challenges and triumphs of János' decades-long career, in which he has managed to juggle what he describes as his three passions: theater, film, and teaching.



János pictured with actress Meryl Street the 2013 Golden Globe Awards

1958 Born in Budapest, Hungary, the son of two Holocaust survivors. "This is one of the most important parts of my heritage," Janos said. "This is a moral compass for me."

2001 Marries Gyöngyvér ("Ginger") Bognár, a Hungarian actress. Two of his children Peter, 19, and Jakob, 11, live with him in Potomac. His older daughter Hannah remains in Hungary.

1994 Career takes off with the film *Woyzeck* (winner of the Oscar-like 1994 Felix Award, now the European Film Award). Gains international recognition for *The Witman Boys* (screened at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival/Un Certain Regard section.) "Szasz's skill with actors was a crucial element in the dramatic success of his last two films," *Variety* magazine reported at the time.

1999/2000 Directs *Eyes of the Holocaust,* one in a series of films produced by Spielberg and Spielberg's Shoah Foundation to preserve the stories of Holocaust survivors. János recently spoke to GDS students about the making of the documentary. HS History teacher Topher Dunne said conversation flowed organically as János offered frank commentary that helped connect the past to the present. "The gravitas that János and his work command are significant," he said.

2000 Joins Harvard University's American Repertory Theater, where he served as a faculty member for eight years and as director of the theater's Institute for Advanced Theatre Training for three years (2001-2003)

2001 At the request of then-Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith, visits DC to direct Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire.* Marty Lodge, one of the actors, told *The Washington Post*: "We knew right from the auditions that it was not going to be your father's *Streetcar Named Desire*. We thought [János] was a little insane, but at the same time, brilliant."

2008 Returns to Hungary to make films and resume his faculty position at the prestigious University of Theatre and Film Arts in Budapest.



János and the cast the opening of Arena Stage's *Angels*

2013 Hungary's Oscar selection committee submits his film *The Notebook* (not to be confused with the Ryan Gosling movie) as its entry for the Academy Awards foreign-language film category. The film, an adaptation of a best-selling novel, also won the top honor at a major European event, the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival.

2020 Resigns from his 23-year faculty position in Budapest to protest the authoritarian government's takeover of the university, which the regime viewed as a left-wing bastion. Protests and a student-led barricade followed, as did harassment of the university's top managers, all of whom resigned. "If you ask me about this, I get so angry, my blood pressure goes up," said János, adding that he refused to legitimize the takeover by accepting the government's offer to stay.

2022 Leaves Hungary with his family to settle in the United States.

202 3 Joins GDS after the retirement of Laura Rosberg, a 44-year GDS veteran. "Laura created such a great program with many traditions," János said. "I don't want to ever take away from what she established, but there are some elements I want to make my own. This will take time."

2024 (January) János and 11 others involved in *Angels in America* are nominated for the Helen Hayes Award, making the play one of this year's most nominated productions. "I couldn't have done it alone," Janos said. "I'm … I'm so grateful that my beautiful and wonderful friend Molly Smith invited me to do this. It was a great joy."

2024 (April) Directs his first GDS musical, *Cinderella*, with a few not-so-traditional twists. "Our GDS faculty includes dedicated artists such as Jason Strunk, Maria Watson, and Brad Linde," Jason said. "I'm in love with them."

EGOTs IN THE MAKING?

GDS probably has at least one future EGOT in its student ranks, if not more. For those of you unfamiliar with the *30 Rock* storyline that popularized the acronym, EGOT refers to superstar talents who have won at least one Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, *and* Tony award. The rarified list of EGOTs includes Elton John, Viola Davis, John Legend, and Whoopi Goldberg, to name a few. So take a close look at the GDS actors, dancers, and musicians, and come see them perform. One day, you might just say: "I knew them when ..."







For the **HIGH SCHOOL FALL SHOW,** HS students performed *You Can't Take It With You* by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman. The comedic play is a window into the lives of a hilarious, eccentric family. Under the direction of award-winning HS Theater Director János Szász, the November performance drew many laughs from the Black Box's packed-in audience.

PHOTOS BY SOSI AUDAIN '26, KAI PARK '27



GETOWN DAYS
NG 2024

Performers sang, danced, and spun the magical tale of what happens when an overworked parent and her teenager swap bodies, gaining fresh perspectives into each other's lives. The November **MIDDLE SCHOOL FALL SHOW** shined under the guidance of LMS Arts Department Chair Keith Hudspeth, MS theater teacher Marcel Smith, dance teacher Felipe Oyarzun Moltedo, and LMS visual arts teachers Jenn Heffernan and Ashley Ortiz.











WATCH FOR GDS ALUMNI AT THE 2024 TONY AWARDS ON JUNE 16.

David Schwartz '88 served as a producer for *Illinoise: A New Musical*, which snagged four nominations, including best musical. **Quincy Tyler Bernstine '92** was nominated for best performance by an actor in a leading role in a play for her turn as Mrs. Muller in *Doubt: A Parable*. **Leigh Silverman '92** was nominated for best direction of a musical for her work on *Suffs*, which scored six nominations total. And **Noah Robbins '09** played Charlie Cotchipee in *Purlie Victorious: A Non-Confederate Romp Through the Cotton Patch*, which also earned six nominations, including best revival of a play. Noah is slated to appear in Apple's *Project Artemis*, starring alongside Scarlett Johansson and Channing Tatum.

And in case you missed the 2023 Emmy Awards (which aired in January 2024 due to the Hollywood writers strike) .... **Joanna Rothkopf '08,** senior writer for *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, won her fifth Emmy for outstanding writing for a TV series.


David Schwartz


Noah Robbins


Leigh Silverman



On a snowy week in January, the **GDS MIDDLE SCHOOL SYMPHONIC BAND** performed their annual winter concert. Conducted by LMS music teachers Sasha Soper and Regina LaValley, the student musicians ushered in the second day of snow that week with seasonal winter numbers, then wrapped things up with the theme from *Mission: Impossible* and a Taylor Swift medley, an audience favorite.













Student-organized **BIANNUAL CABARETS** are designed to encourage participation in the performing arts, especially for those who cannot commit to the School's time-intensive musicals or other performances. For each show, all are welcome to propose a musical act and perform it. The events raise proceeds for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS through the sale of baked goods and other concessions during intermission. Joseph Stocker '24 and Olivia Brown '24 (not pictured) organized this year's Fall Cabaret.

PHOTOS BY KAI PARK '27

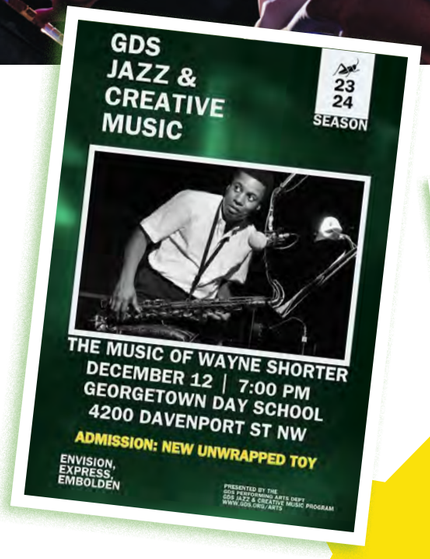






For their annual **WINTER CONCERT,** HS students in the Jazz and Creative Music program celebrated the work of Wayne Shorter, the influential saxophonist, composer, and band leader who helped shape modern jazz. To honor Shorter, who died just a few months shy of his 90th birthday last year, the students organized themselves into nine bands and played his music for 90 minutes. The Black Box was set up to resemble a nightclub, and the price of admission was a new, unwrapped toy that would be donated to Toys for Tots.

PHOTOS BY KAI PARK '27













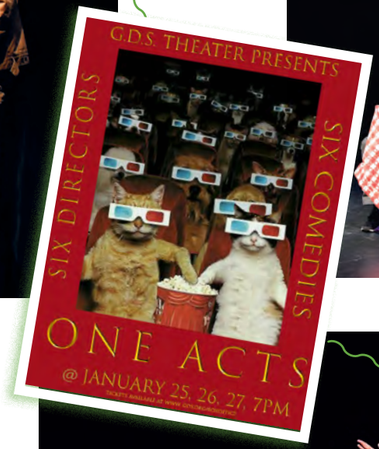




GDS THEATER LAB, the School's newest theater company, features small-cast plays and musicals by playwrights whose demographics have been traditionally marginalized, including women, who are underrepresented when it comes to writing for the stage. In November, the Theater Lab presented *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, by Rachel Shenkin. *The Bee* is a musical comedy with music and lyrics by William Finn. In the show, six adolescents compete in a middle school spelling competition run by three eccentric adults. The cast invites four audience members on stage to compete in the bee alongside the actors.

PHOTOS BY JERI TIDWELL









THE ONE ACTS FESTIVAL in January showcased six short comedic plays directed and managed by students with guidance from János Szász (HS theater director) and Christal Boyd (HS technical director and drama teacher). The plays included: *Check Please* by Jonathan Rand, *Actor's Nightmare* by Christopher Durang, *Business Lunch at the Russian Tea Room* by Christopher Durang, *Centralia Love* by Henry Cohen and Margaret Blomstrom, *Prince Charming's Complaint* by Bruce Kane, and *Attention Detention* by Bradley Hayward.















FATA MORGANA—the dance company led, choreographed, and managed by students—presented their winter dance performance in early January. The program included several different styles of music and dance including jazz, tap, contemporary, hip-hop, and even musical theater. All performances were sold out!

PHOTOS BY JERI TIDWELL



















With a focus on the student dancers' individuality, uniqueness, and personal expression, the **WINTER DANCE SHOWCASE** featured High School and Middle School students. All the performers, along with special guests from the Dana Tai Soon Burgess Dance Company, put on a captivating performance.



The two-hour Winter Extravaganza at GDS featured singers from grades 4 through 12

MORE TO SINGING THAN SONG

"HAVING THAT EXPERIENCE OF SINGING TOGETHER GIVES PEOPLE IDENTITY AND BRINGS A COMMUNITY" JASON STRUNK



JASON STRUNK wants his students to leave GDS with a deeper understanding of the world through the lens of music, and that informs his approach to teaching choir at the High School.

"My goal is not to produce perfect singers," said Jason, chair of the HS Performing Arts Department. "My goal is to produce great world citizens who have a love of music."

The 2023-24 academic year marks the second year of curricular choirs at the High School. Previously, the GDS singers met after school and weren't able to dig into all of the important components of a musical education. Having these classes during the school day allows for the work to go beyond entertainment.

Now, there's the Chamber Singers (open to any student in grades 9 through 12) and a smaller select group called Tolv (the word for "twelve" in some Scandinavian languages and the initial number of singers in the group). An extracurricular choir, the GDS Singers, meets on Wednesdays. All three work together on various concert programs throughout the year.



HS Performing Arts Department Chair Jason Strunk (center) with Tolv singers Koen Yu '25 (left) and Daniel Reilly '25

Jason said he impresses upon the singers that choir is a confluence of many academic disciplines, including poetry, history, higher mathematics, and several branches of science, ranging from anatomy to neuroscience, physics, and psychology.

In rehearsals, students learn about tuning vowels and the acoustics of a room, which is physics at work. They discuss rhythm in terms of mathematics. They think about the physiology of vocal chord vibrations, how listening to music can strengthen neural connections (which is why music can give people the chills), and how music can contribute to well-being.

"There's a ton of academic literature about the health and wellness benefits of singing in a choir," Jason said. "The singers' heart rates sync and their stress levels tend to drop. Having that experience of singing together gives people identity and brings a community into unison."

Lulu Tirado '26, a member of Tolv, said that some of the pieces her mixed ensemble performs are difficult and require the singers to give it their all. "The collective struggle to get through the very hard music is very bonding for us," Lulu said. "We're very close-knit because of our shared interest in singing and beautiful music. I think of that class as a family."

Daniel Reilly '25 said singing with Tolv clears his head and energizes him. The music also has exposed him to theology because many choral songs are religious and taught him skills he has applied beyond music. "I'm a rower and breathing is a big part of the sport," Daniel said. "Through singing, I learned to control my breath and that's been super helpful."

GDS was among the nine independent schools that performed at the Independent Schools Choral Festival (ISCF) Small Vocal Ensemble Night in October. In November, the School hosted the Choralcopia Concert featuring all of its HS choirs and a cappella groups, including Five O'Clock Shadow, Notified, and Eat at Joe's. The following month, the two-hour Winter Choral Extravaganza featured singers from grades 4 through 12.

The program is structured in a way that enables students to see themselves reflected in what they sing at some point in their High School career. "We've highlighted Black composers, queer composers, female composers, and we sing songs from all over the world," Jason said. "I want the students to feel empowered. I want them to think: 'Oh yeah, this music tells the story of a part of me.'"





Jenny Perinovic (néeAdams) with her debut novel, *A Deadly Endeavor*, and her fans at One More Page Books in Arlington during her launch party on March 5.

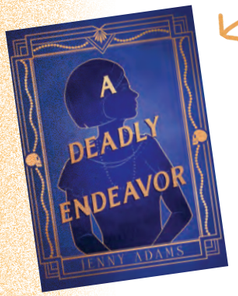
IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED ...

LMS LIBRARIAN JENNY PERINOVIC PUBLISHES HER DEBUT NOVEL, AT LAST!

LOWER/MIDDLE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN Jenny Perinovic keeps a folder, a thick one, of all the rejection letters she's received from book agents and publishers. But after more than a decade of "no," Jenny finally got a "yes." In March 2024, her debut novel, *A Deadly Endeavor*, hit bookstores. And a sequel is in the works.

"At GDS, I talk to the kids a lot about my writing and my rejections," said Jenny, who writes under her maiden name, Adams. "Some of them know it's taken me seven tries to get a book published. I hope it teaches them the value of resilience and not giving up."

The Pennsylvania native and Ohio State University graduate spoke to *Georgetown Days* about what it took to get her first book to print. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



The novel was published by Crooked Lane Books and distributed by Penguin Random House. Kirkus Reviews describes it as "a period tale in which love conquers all societal differences."

Q In a nutshell, what's the plot of A Deadly Endeavor? It's a historical mystery, set in 1921 Philadelphia, about a young, heartbroken socialite and a coroner's assistant who find themselves in search of a serial killer while really wanting to kiss each other. I recently told someone to imagine Alexis Rose from *Schitt's Creek* and Roy Kent from *Ted Lasso* solving a mystery together in Jazz Age Philadelphia.

Q What inspired this story? That's a hard one to answer because when I started writing this book, it was a young adult fantasy novel about a girl who sees ghosts, a boy who's a necromancer, and the 1918 influenza pandemic. But when I wrote the first chapter, my main character's voice took over, and it was clear I was working on a book for adults, which was a whole new world for me.

I really wanted to tell a story set in Philadelphia, where I was living at the time, and I wanted to tell a story about two broken people–a heartbroken socialite plagued with migraines and a shell-shocked veteran of World War I–who find love (and also solve murders). It's changed a lot since I first sat down to write it, but I'm so proud of how it evolved!

Q When did you start writing for publication, and how do you find time for it? I started writing seriously after I graduated from college in 2010. I write whenever and wherever I can. On the bus, on the metro, on my lunch breaks. There's never a perfect time to write. Even in the summer when I'm not working, I'm a full-time mom [to daughter Ellie, 5]. But writing is always on my mind. When I'm doing the dishes, I'm playing things out in my head. With a sequel to write, I wake up at 4:30 a.m. and write until 5:45. It's a lot to balance. I should probably get more sleep than I do.

Q What was your college major? I thought I'd major in history, but I ended up majoring in medieval and renaissance studies with a concentration in 14th-century French literature after I took a class on French fairytales and loved it. It was an interdisciplinary major. So I studied literature, art history, religion, history, and architecture–including a class on gothic cathedrals. You should see me in cathedrals. I'm such a nerd about it.

Q Were your studies linked to your desire to become an author? No. I wanted to be a librarian! Every freshman took a freshman experience class that paired them with a senior faculty member at Ohio State. The one I took was with the director of libraries, and he took us to the university's Book Depository. It is a warehouse with millions and millions of books, and I thought: This is what I want to do. I've been working in libraries since my sophomore year of college and in 2015, I went to library school at Drexel University.

I've always written, but as the first person in my family to go to college, I never had the privilege of thinking I could do it without another way of supporting myself. It's too unstable!

Q Did you take/need any formal writing instruction? I used to work at Johns Hopkins University, and I took a few classes in their writing program while I was there. I also did two really incredible workshops: one with Nova Ren Suma, a young adult author, and one at the Tin House, a small publisher that holds a prestigious workshop series. Most of it, though, was self-driven. There are so many craft books out there, from Lisa Cron's *Story Genius* to Gail Carriger's *The Heroine's Journey*, not to mention *Craft in the Real World* by Matthew Salesses. I also am a voracious reader.

Honestly, I think the best way to learn is to build a community of writers around you. I've collected writer friends at book signings, writers' meetups, and in online author groups. You learn so much from reading and critiquing other people's work. And then once you hit a certain level of writing, it's all about finding the right person or the right set of people who are going to champion your books and get them sold.

Q How difficult was it to find a literary agent? It took a long time! I tried for a decade to sign with an agent with six different books. In 2020-21, I wrote a book that was a retelling of *Beauty and the Beast* set in 16th-century Germany. That book poured out of me. I wrote it in 17 days! I sent out about 40 queries to literary agents, including Amy Giuffrida, who would eventually become my agent. And then the book was on submission to a publisher for almost three years. It came close, but never sold, which is what actually happens to the vast majority of books. There's a whole team of people who need to say yes for a book to get published. I've learned that every book published is a miracle.

A Deadly Endeavor sold on a revise and resubmit, which means an editor had interest, but wanted certain elements reworked before they would commit to publishing it. I almost didn't do it. I thought: I'm just going to hear 'no' again. It was [LMS Librarian] Lisa Fall who encouraged me to follow through, and I'm glad I listened.

Q What kind of research goes into your books? There's a lot of research. It's not all imagination! For *A Deadly Endeavor*, I did a lot of digging through digitized Urban Archives at Temple University, and the digital collections of the Free Library of Philadelphia. My husband is a military historian, which comes in handy when I need to figure out things like how somebody could be electrocuted in the trenches during World War I. I even took a class on autopsies because one of the main characters, Gilbert, is a coroner. Right now, I'm doing research for book two, which deals with a silent film studio and poisonings. My search history on the internet is pretty wild.

Q What advice would you give a young writer? Find a way to separate yourself from your work. At Johns Hopkins, in the very first class I took, we had weekly workshops. All of us would submit our work, and the class would critique it. You weren't allowed to say anything while people discussed the strengths and flaws of your writing. You just had to listen. The work would have to stand for itself. That's a valuable lesson for young writers. Your work is separate from you. Your work is what is being accepted or rejected, not you personally. I also learned that any experience that your reader has with your work is completely out of your control. Your job is to write the words, and you have one experience with those words. But their experience reading those words is just as valid as yours.

FACULTY

"I THINK THE BEST WAY TO LEARN IS TO BUILD A COMMUNITY OF WRITERS AROUND YOU." JENNY PERINOVIC

TOP 12 EDUCATIONAL APPS



THE REMOTE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT thrust upon us at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic expanded teachers' understanding of how to leverage digital tools that would motivate students to learn. While we're all happy to be back in the classroom, we also recognize that these types of tools are here to stay. So we asked the Middle School department chairs to compile a list of their favorite educational apps–ones that support students, their families, or educators. Here are a dozen of the apps that they say help teach new skills, provide an interesting venue for exploring topics, or respond to different learning styles.

1. PADLET is a virtual post board that allows for crowd-sharing of information such as videos, articles, and photos to create a space for asynchronous learning and collaboration.

2. EDPUZZLE allows educators to provide content prior to a class so that all the class time can be used for other purposes such as labs, collaborative learning experiences, and projects.

3. PEARDECK enhances Google Slide presentations by embedding questions in the slides that students can answer in real time on their Chromebooks and other devices.

4. NEARPOD allows teachers to take students on virtual field trips.

5. BRILLIANT offers dynamic math tasks that are fun for kids and adults alike. Students receive "bite-sized" lessons and level up to more challenging problems. They can collaborate with others on forums or join video challenges with esteemed mathematicians if they gain standing on the site.

6. DESMOS Online Graphing Calculator and Desmos Classroom Lessons provide students with interactive math lessons.

7. NOODLE TOOLS helps students organize their research and properly cite their work.

8. FLIP (previously Flipgrid) is great for verbal processing, brainstorming, reflection, and reading out loud. Each school year, MS community members are invited to use Flip to record their names and pronouns so that others can use the recordings as a reference tool.

9. CANVA software provides professional and clean-looking designs for presentations, videos, flyers, and documents.

10. SLIDO makes class participation more equitable by enabling students to contribute to classroom discussions in writing so that teachers hear from a range of students, not just those who raise their hands.

11. SMITHSONIAN LEARNING LAB is like Pinterest for educators and learners. Sign up online for free to explore primary and secondary sources, lessons, and more.

12. BREAKYOUROWNNEWS.COM enables students to write newspaper-style headlines, which helps them synthesize ideas into concise and memorable chunks.

"AS SOON AS I SAW MY WORK HANGING THERE, I CHOKED UP..." MICHELLE COBB

A PLACE OF HONOR



A photo silkscreen made by HS Arts Department Chair Michelle Cobb (left) now hangs in U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson's chambers.

HANGING IN JUSTICE KETANJI BROWN JACKSON'S Supreme Court chambers is a silkscreen photo by none other than our very own Michelle Cobb, HS Studio Arts Teacher and Department Chair.

Justice Jackson, a former GDS parent and Board Trustee, knew Michelle through the School. Shortly after her Senate confirmation, Jackson perused Michelle's artist website and spotted "Harlem Kids," which Michelle created when she was a 19-year-old student-teacher in New York City. "She knew right away that this was the piece she wanted," Michelle said. Several discussions later, a blown-up version of that silkscreen made its way to the Supreme Court, where it now hangs in a wooden frame built by the Court's carpentry shop.

On April 2, 2024, Michelle met with Justice Jackson and got a chance to see her work on display. Michelle was joined by her husband Michael and her son Christopher (one of her three grown children.) While Michelle can't say much about the visit for privacy reasons, she did share this detail: "As soon as I saw my work hanging there, I choked up," she said. "This is the most important thing that's happened to me in my career as an artist, and I am extremely grateful to Justice Jackson for this opportunity."

TEACHERS & STAFF THEY'RE JUST LIKE US

THEY ATTEND HOLIDAY PARTIES

Bus Driver Yolanda Gantt (left) and Director of Security Shelley Harris chillaxed at the GDS Faculty and Staff Holiday Party at Clyde's on Wisconsin Avenue.





THEY TAKE LONG BIKE RIDES (AND COFFEE BREAKS)

HS History Teacher Marjorie Hale and her hubby enjoy bike rides on Saturday mornings while the kids are sleeping in. "We often take this route that goes from NW DC to Takoma Park and then back down through DC," Marjorie said. One chilly Saturday, they stopped mid-ride at Tacoma Bev Co.

THEY HAVE (MEGA) FAMILY REUNIONS

Every five years, Athletic Director David Gillespie's family has a reunion. Last year, they gathered in DC, and David helped host the fun. "Every branch of my Dad's side of the family was represented," David said. "We had a fabulous time together."





THEY DO CPR TRAINING

1 and 2 and 3 … HS Math Teacher Julia Penn takes her turn at chest compressions as her colleagues Tuan Nguyen (right) and Richard Avidon act as bystanders.



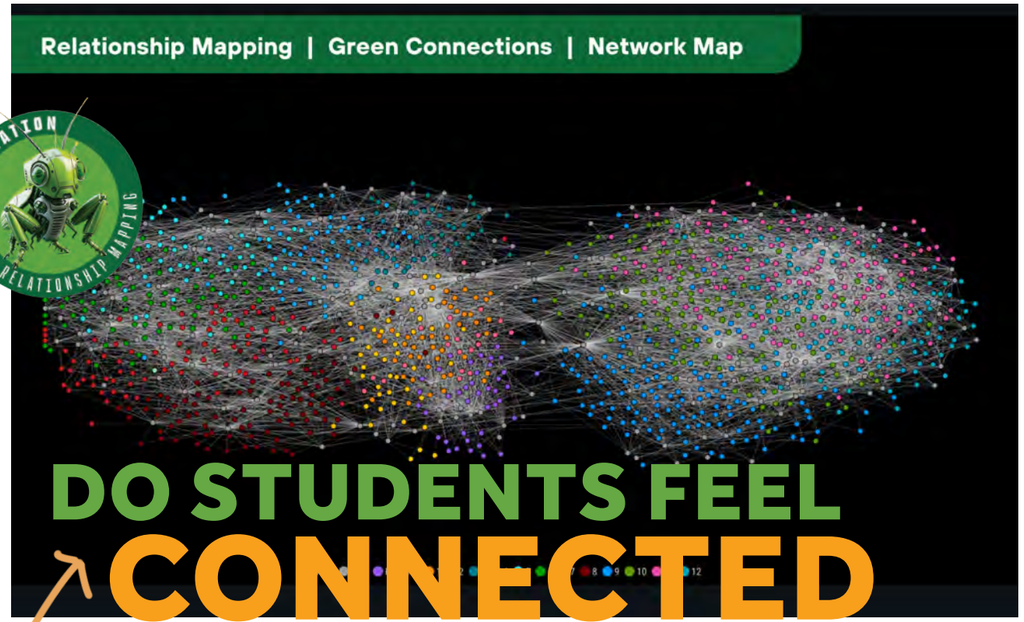
THEY LOVE YAYOI KUSAMA

Third Grade teacher Foun Tang was NOT one of the 160,000 DC visitors who flocked to the Hirshhorn Museum a few years ago for Yayoi Kusama's spell-binding Infinity Mirrors exhibit. "I was not able to secure a ticket," Foun said. But she managed to attend the Japanese artist's exhibit in Tokyo last summer. Finally!



THEY LOVE NEW YORK-STYLE PIZZA

HS Jazz and Instrumental Music Teacher Brad Linde hit 11 pizza places in eight hours while visiting the Big Apple with friends. (So maybe not so much "like us?") The pizza tour of Brooklyn included a stop at Paulie Gee's (above).



DO STUDENTS FEEL CONNECTED TO GDS TEACHERS?

"RELATIONSHIP MAPPING" OFFERS CLUES

GDS FACULTY HAS BEEN WORKING TO REFINE A TOOL CALLED "RELATIONSHIP MAPPING," which aims to ensure that every student feels connected to at least one adult in the School.

"We're looking beyond grades to measure how students are doing and to make sure we've got as many eyes on them as possible," said Bobby Asher, Director of Student Community Programming.

Relationship mapping has been used for decades by social workers, corporate leaders, and more recently educators to assess a person's sources of support, emotional and otherwise. Bobby thought about how to apply the concept at GDS after hearing about it a few years ago from GDS Board Member Jim Shelton, a former deputy secretary of education in the Obama administration. The result: a collaboration between Bobby and the GDS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion team that led to a staff-wide relationship mapping initiative–with a twist.

When previously applied to schools, relationship mapping involved having an institution's faculty and staff gather at one location where the names of all the students would be posted on walls. The adults would then tag each name with color-coded stickers that indicate how well they know a student. The public nature of that approach prompted GDS to explore other options, as did the lack of a system for tracking which adults placed which dots by a student's name, making it difficult to follow up with questions.

To address these issues, GDS set up a digital system, designed by GDS Technology Specialist Mauricio Mantilla, in which teachers and staff could use their phones and a QR Code to pull down students' names and assign them virtual dots: green if they feel they know the student well, yellow if they recognize a student's face but not necessarily their name, and red if they have concerns about the student–in which case the adult would need to know them well enough to assign a green dot as well. The system captures each adult's email address making it easy to follow up with questions while limiting access to the results, thereby eliminating privacy concerns. The first round of mapping took place last school year and the second this fall.

The constellation of dots above represents the connections between students and adults at GDS. A limited number of administrators can access the underlying information by dragging a cursor to a particular dot, and with the press of a button, find out who is connected to whom. The system also allows administrators to drill deep into specific connections.



Teachers and staff use their phones and a QR Code to pull down student names and assign them color-coded dots indicating how well they know each student.

Bobby said that the results are useful in spotting trends. "Maybe we spot an issue within a grade or among a certain demographic of students," he said. "We can respond by alerting the grade dean or holding more community events." But perhaps more importantly, the data allow the School to dig into individual student needs. If a student has a lot of red dots by their name, the student support team will work with divisional administration to ensure that student has the approaches and interventions needed. If a student experiences a traumatic event, such as a death in the family, the digital system can produce a list of all the adults in the School with ties to that student and notify them. With the press of a button, the system can even produce a visual of the web of connections between all or certain students and adults in the School.

Relationship mapping should also help teachers pause and reflect, said Marlo Thomas, Assistant Head for Equity and Inclusion. They can think about how to connect with the students they don't know or strengthen relationships with students they don't know very well. They can tap into proven relationship-building techniques, such as setting aside five minutes for five days to have a conversation with those students. "We're really thinking about how we can explore relationships with more intention," Marlo said.

Many indicators suggest that GDS students are connected to an adult in the School. In the most recent relationship mapping exercise, nearly all students had a green dot by their name. Nine percent had red dots.

GDS also works to gauge the students' sense of belonging from their perspective. In 2021, GDS participated in a survey conducted by Challenge Success, a nonprofit school reform organization affiliated with Stanford University, which reported that more than 70 percent of GDS students said they have an adult they can go to at School if they have a problem, a strong showing compared to schools of similar size and type nationwide.

For the past two years, similar informal polls conducted by the School have had related findings. Most recently, all 270 of the HS students surveyed in the 2022-23 school year said they felt valued by at least one teacher at School and more than three-quarters of the MS students said they know of one adult who is happy to see them at school every day.

Director of Student Community Programming Bobby Asher helped create a relationship mapping tool at GDS.

The effort to gauge students' sense of belonging and connection on many fronts is informed by a growing body of research, which shows that students who feel connected to their school are more likely to thrive academically, bond with their peers, and experience good emotional and physical health.

"Relationship mapping is not a panacea," Bobby said. "But it's another tool we have at our disposal, a way to look at another layer of student well-being so that we have a good handle on what is going on with them."



BYE, BARBARA BUONORA!

FOR DECADES, A "NORTH STAR" TO STUDENTS, COLLEAGUES





Then and now, Barbara's first GDS class in 1992-93 and her most recent.

BARBARA BUONORA knew she wanted to teach young children long before she joined GDS in 1992.

In first grade, she loved to "play school" with her youngest sibling. "Whatever I learned in class, I'd go home and teach it to her," Barbara said. "I saw her excitement about every little piece of knowledge I'd pass on. I think it sparked something in me."

As a teenager, Barbara grew seriously intrigued by early childhood education. Perhaps it was her babysitting jobs that did it or the Montessori school near her Northern Virginia home. She'd walk past it every day and marvel at the artwork outside, each piece unique and rich in texture.

Whatever it was, Barbara understood heading into college that she wanted to help shape the lives of the youngest learners. She chose to attend Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia because it was one of the few institutions that offered a Montessori specialization as part of a Bachelor's degree. The Montessori philosophy remained part of Barbara's toolbox throughout her teaching career, first in Pennsylvania and Texas and then in DC, where she taught at American University's Child Development Center and NCRC in Cleveland Park before GDS.

This academic year marks Barbara's last at the School, where she is now a pre-k teacher after decades of teaching both pre-k and kindergarten. There's no shortage of people who are going to miss her calm and gentle presence, her patience as both a teacher and a colleague, and her knack for making a lasting impression on her students.

"When I think GDS, I think Barbara," said Sydney Kamen'15, one of Barbara's former students. "She will forever be my favorite teacher. Except for when my mother died, I don't think I've ever cried harder in my life than the day I realized that going to first grade meant Barbara would not be my teacher anymore."

A WARM AND "UNFLAPPABLE" EDUCATOR

Seared into Sydney's brain is the memory of being with her kindergarten class on September 11, 2001. News of the terrorist attacks had just broken, and she and her rattled classmates were sitting in a hallway at the MacArthur Boulevard campus, lined up against the wall. "I think it was the first time I saw grown-ups cry, and I knew something was terribly wrong," she said. "But then I saw Barbara. She was calm and steady. I remember thinking: 'We're going to be okay.'"

It's that soothing presence that drew Sydney back to Barbara's classroom long after kindergarten. In middle school, she'd run to visit Barbara during recess. When her parents got divorced toward the start of high school, it was Barbara she wanted to see. When her mother got sick and later when she died, Barbara was one of the first people she wanted to call. And when there's something to celebrate, like a big career move, it's Barbara she wants to tell.

"She's got a warmth to her but also a strength that exudes a sense of security, safety, and reliability," said Sydney, a career U.S. diplomat. "It never mattered how far I got from pre-k and kindergarten; that door was always open to me, and I always went in. I still do."

Jody Welsh, a kindergarten teacher who has known Barbara since they were both teaching at NCRC, said Barbara's calm demeanor belies her fiery passion for children and education. Those who know Barbara well, she added, understand that although she will never be the loudest person in the room, she has strong opinions that she expresses only when they're fully developed. And even then, she always relays them in a measured manner.

"That steadiness is why so many people consider her to be their North Star," Jody said. "She is an unflappable and focused person who does not shy away from advocating for children's right to ample play time, to experiential learning, and to showing up as their authentic selves."

THE ROLE MODEL FROM OKINAWA

Barbara, the sixth eldest of seven children in her family, is the daughter of two State Department employees. She was born in Okinawa, Japan (where her parents were stationed at the time), moved to Northern Virginia when she was 3, to Spain at age 6, and then back to Virginia.

"Those early childhood years really made an impression on me," Barbara said about her three years in Madrid. She remembers the sheep that would be herded in her corner of the city, the movies filmed there, the church near her home, and the fields of beautiful red poppies she passed on her bus ride to school. "It was the 60s, and my siblings and I were left to explore on our own."

That visceral understanding of how young minds process their surroundings combined with her academic credentials shaped Barbara's approach to the classroom and her interactions with children. More than a decade into her GDS teaching career, she earned a master's degree in early childhood education from Concordia University, St. Paul that deepened her understanding of some of the best-known early childhood theorists.

From the teachings of Maria Montessori, she grew to appreciate practical life lessons (such as pouring water into a jar) that help children build confidence and handle objects with care, as well as the hands-on tools made of natural materials that stimulate multiple senses. The teachings of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky informed her about the stages of cognitive development and the "zone of proximal development," which taught her to challenge students by pushing them a little beyond their abilities but not so much that they grow too frustrated and shut down.

"These philosophers really spoke to me in terms of how I can get children to the next level and encourage them not to give up," Barbara said. "My education, my life experiences, they all got me thinking about how to bring the wider world to young children and help them explore it."

Former GDS teacher Skylé Pearson witnessed how Barbara incorporated exploration and imagination into the classroom during their decade of teaching together at the School.

When Skylé joined GDS in 2004, Barbara taught her (and the students) how to gently handle and care for the chicks



Barbara early in her career at the MacArthur Boulevard campus.

that were hatched in the classroom. She made breathtaking door displays, including the particularly memorable Halloween pumpkin that students could "walk into" as they entered class. Then there was the phenomenal dramatic play area that Barbara stocked with every imaginable accouterment for dress-up.

"And at the end, the students would neatly put it all away, even though they really did not want the play time to end," Skylé said. "If a room became unsafe because of scattered toys or some other issue, Barbara had this amazing, calm way of speaking that made the whole class pause, including me, to hear what she had to say."

As the decades passed, Barbara's devotion to her students never faded, nor did her commitment to grow and evolve as a teacher and a person, said Assistant Lower School Principal Denise Jones, who also co-taught with Barbara. "Just because something has been done a certain way for a long time, Barbara's position was that it didn't have to stay that way," Denise said. "She was a role model to me early in my career because of the way she was always adding to her knowledge as a teacher."

LETTING THEM BE KIDS

That role model quality was echoed by many of the teachers who know Barbara. LS Science teacher Eric Friedenson taught 8th graders before joining GDS in 2006. He credits Barbara with showing him how to engage the School's youngest learners and present scientific terms in a way that was accurate but not too technical.

"If a lesson was too watered down she'd ask higher level questions to help the kids explore a subject a little more deeply," said Eric, the LS Science Department chair. "She took on the lessons with intention so that we could deliver high-value scientific literacy to these young minds. But she also really understood her students. Sometimes they were tired. Sometimes they just needed to play. Barbara knew how to balance all their needs. She had high expectations of the kids, but she also let them be kids."

Mae Lazerow '27 remembers Barbara being a very approachable teacher who never talked down to her students, whether she was helping with a math problem or navigating a dispute. "I always felt important in her class because I felt she didn't treat us like babies," Mae said. "She really seemed to care about all of us as people, not just students."

Barbara's caring nature comes through in her many thoughtful gestures. For the yearbook, she scours through photos of her class to make sure each student is represented, said MS Science teacher Michael Desautels, the former yearbook editor. And when teachers started sending congratulatory notes to 8th graders a few years ago, Barbara went the extra mile to make them feel special, said LMS Arts Department Chair Keith Hudspeth.

"Barbara attached pictures and little mementos from when these 8th graders were in her pre-K or kindergarten class. She had held onto these things all those years and took the time to put them together," Keith said.

Another glimpse of Barbara's sentimental side comes from her former student Lulu Wachs '27. Lulu was in third grade when she stopped to chat with Barbara during recess. "Barbara showed me that she was wearing a necklace that I had given her in kindergarten," Lulu said. "I was very shocked. It's these little things that make me think about her every time I reflect about my time at GDS and what it means to me."

WHAT BARBARA IS *NOT* GOING TO DO

Barbara's time at GDS was interrupted only by a two-year absence when she and her husband adopted their son Matthew. Now, as she reflects on her 30 years at the School, she thinks about her students. "What's always interested me about children in that age group is their huge imagination," she said. "They're so fun and funny."

She also appreciates the supportive nature of the GDS community, which banded together through times of joy and tragedy. "That ability for the faculty, students, and parents to come together and work toward helping each other is something to be proud of and uphold," she said.

Barbara is not sure what's in store for her once summer ends and she's not preparing for another academic year. Maybe some volunteer work. Time puttering around her garden (a fabulous spectacle by all accounts.) More visits with Matthew. More reading. More sleep.

"The one thing I'm definitely not going to do," she said, "is wake up at 5:30 a.m.



JASON PUTSCHÉ

HS Studio Arts teacher Nick Ryan working on the pottery wheel with Joe Finkelstein '24 as Brady Leblanc '27 (middle) and Ahren Sidhu '27 shape their pieces.

"MASTER EDUCATOR" BIDS FAREWELL TO GDS



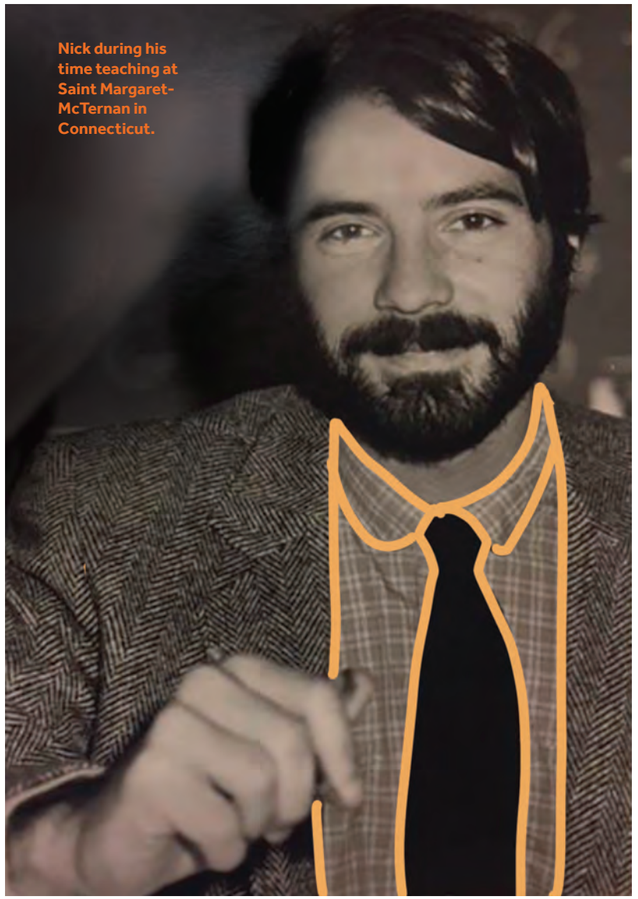
NICK RYAN DEVELOPED A LOVE OF ART–and an interest in teaching–as a high school student at Pomfret School, a small Connecticut boarding school with Beaux-Arts style buildings on a massive hilltop overlooking quaint countryside cottages and dairy farms.

It was at Pomfret that Nick's passion for sculpting and ceramics unfolded, in large part due to his time in the studio with Arts teacher Alice Dunbar. "The studio was hideous from the outside, but inside it was beautiful; the tall ceilings, kind of industrial looking, and it had a forge in it so she could melt metal and cast bronze and aluminum," Nick said. "We had an oxyacetylene torch. We had pottery wheels. She taught me lost-wax bronze casting sculpture. … She was making her own art while also teaching."

It was also at Pomfret that Nick toyed with the idea of perhaps returning to the school to teach. When his brother Danny was visiting for Nick's graduation ceremony, Nick pointed out the beautiful faculty houses around campus and noted how nice it must be for the teachers to have their room and board taken care of by the school. Danny's response made an impression: "But you're going to be living in the middle of nowhere," he said.

Turns out his big brother was right. After growing up in a small Connecticut town and then launching a teaching career that took him to similarly sized locations, Nick decided he belonged in a big city. He came to GDS more than 24 years ago to teach art, and he will retire at the end of this school year. His students and colleagues will remember Nick for his kindness and supportive nature.





Nick during his time teaching at Saint Margaret-McTernan in Connecticut.

GDS High School Arts Department Chair Michelle Cobb said that Nick has been her trusted colleague and mentor since she joined the School 19 years ago and a person she heavily relied on when she took over as department chair, a post that Nick once held. "Nick is truly a master educator, embodying an unparalleled work ethic and a passion for instilling a love for ceramics in countless students," said Michelle, who is also a HS arts teacher. "I have had the privilege to not only benefit from his expertise in teaching, but also to witness firsthand the transformative impact he has had on those he has taught. I will deeply miss his unwavering support, mentorship, and friendship."

Anna Belber '24 said she appreciates Nick's commitment to his students."Part of what makes Nick and his classes so special is that his studio is always open," said Anna, who has taken two classes with Nick since her sophomore year. "This means that I, as well as many other students, have a safe space on campus where we can also have an outlet through art. This sense of security both in the space Nick created and with Nick himself is a large part of what shaped my time at the High School."

FROM SMALL TOWNS TO A BIG CITY

Nick received a BA from Connecticut College, where he majored in Studio Art and minored in Art History. He then attended graduate school at the Pratt Institute in New York, where he earned an MFA in Drawing & Painting and got a taste of big-city life.

Despite the bleak economic landscape at the time, Nick landed a job as an art teacher at the Winchendon School in Massachusetts. He credits the school for teaching him how to teach. After a short stint at a Florida school, Nick ended up in Connecticut again, this time at Saint Margaret-McTernan (now the Chase Collegiate School). During his nearly 20 years at St. Margaret, Nick wore many hats. Aside from teaching art, he had been the school's photographer and yearbook advisor. With his move to GDS, he hoped to spend all his time in the classroom–and in a city.

"I grew up in a town of 5,700, and at one point I lived in a town of 1,600," Nick said. "I thought: it's time. …I went to grad school in New York City, and I missed that experience. So I began applying to schools in all the major cities."

After GDS hired him, Nick realized the resources provided by the School and the enthusiasm for art among students would allow him to broaden the curriculum he had developed at St. Margaret's and even sharpen his own teaching skills.



Maya Cruz-Hubbard '24 puts finishing touches on her work.

"The courses I taught at [St. Margaret] were shorter: six weeks, and then they changed. At GDS, the art courses last all year long, and the classes are an hour long," Nick said. "And with amazing facilities, I just realized you could do more here with the kids."

A "SPECTACULAR" LEARNING TRAJECTORY

At GDS, Nick began teaching painting, drawing, and ceramics because these were his own areas of study.

"I love teaching the painting and drawing class, but it was really the ceramics classes that seemed to me the easiest to teach because the kids were so enthralled with the process," Nick said. "I used to start [the ceramics classes] with building pieces by hand. But then I realized that the only reason students took the course was because they wanted to be on the pottery wheel. So the next year I put them on the pottery wheels on the very first day, and they were happier and made faster progress."

The first three or four weeks of learning ceramics are typically the hardest, Nick said. Building the necessary skills and concentration, understanding the quality of the clay, how much water to use, how fast to spin the wheel, how to hold your hands–it's a lot of information for students to process. Nick assures them that they will get the hang of it with time, and they always do. "The [learning] trajectory is really a spectacular, gentle curve," Nick said.

Anna agrees. "Over the years, Nick helped me learn and grow confidence whether I was on the wheel or hand-building," she said. "His teaching style allowed me to make my own mistakes and learn how to fix them."

Katherine Toufanian '25 said Nick's nurturing nature allows for learning from mistakes. "He encourages me to go for it and is always willing to help if things go wrong," Katherine said.

PRIDE IN HIS WORK

Nick credits the department chair, Michelle, for encouraging him to create Upper Level courses. "What I'm doing [in those UL courses] is creating an environment that allows students to explore their own creativity," Nick said. "Every single student is self-directed. So I'm really there to troubleshoot, give them some advice, technical or visual, and brainstorm ideas. But they are, in essence, teaching themselves through their own experience."

Nick said that he has learned from his students and adapted his courses accordingly. At their request, he switched from using low-fire red, white, or gray clay in ceramics class to high-fire clay that is used to make stoneware. He'd resisted the switch because using stoneware clay calls for firing at hotter temperatures that would quickly wear out the class's old electric kilns. Gas kilns, on the other hand, are more suitable for high temperatures.

"I thought, you know what? These [electric] kilns are getting old. It's time to replace them," Nick said. "So I ordered the stoneware clay, and they loved it. It looks much more professional, and when the clay is exposed, it looks beautiful, as opposed to white clay, which just looks unfinished."

During his time at GDS, Nick said he is most proud of sustaining and invigorating what he believes to be one of the strongest visual arts departments in the District, a program that uses a mixture of structure and freedom to enable creativity. He's also proud of his students, who earned 26 National Scholastic Art Awards this year–more than any other year during his time at GDS. Nick said he admires the giving nature of his colleagues, including C.A. Pilling, who worked with her colleagues to establish a holiday gift from faculty to the maintenance crew, cleaning staff, and security guards who take such good care of the School.

These are the people and traditions he's going to miss when he retires and starts globetrotting and immersing himself in new places with his new life partner, Nick said.

"I walk onto campus every day now, and even when I'm in the parking garage, I think: one day I won't be walking across this, I won't be coming into school, I won't have this sense of purpose. I won't have all these fascinating fellow teachers. I won't have all these kids who have all this potential," Nick said. "I look at those kids and think anything's possible."

REFLECTION AND INNOVATION



CLAIRE SIMON '24

SECOND GRADERS WITH THEIR BLUEPRINTS AND MODELS FOR THE "POLLUTION SOLUTIONS" PROJECT, WHICH CHALLENGES THEM TO GENERATE IDEAS FOR CLEANING AND/OR PROTECTING WATERWAYS.

TEACHERS TEST-DRIVE NEW IDEAS

THE GDS MISSION STATEMENT calls on teachers to challenge the intellectual and creative abilities of their students and foster strength of character, which is why the School launched the GDS Innovation Fund in January, building on the success of generous summer curriculum grants that enable faculty and staff to bring the most cutting-edge experiences to the classroom.

"All of this is done with an eye toward improving student learning, student outcomes, and student engagement," said Associate Head of School Meg Goldner Rabinowitz. "The summer grants allow new and returning teachers to align, define, and expand their curriculum. The new Innovation Fund helps staff test-drive ideas in a way that has a broader institutional impact."

The Innovation Fund, made possible through a gift from the Perlin family, invites GDS staff to submit proposals for pilot projects that are not covered by the annual budgetary process. This year's winners–Kathleen Dawson (with colleagues) and C.A. Pilling–will each receive $10,000 spread across two years to try out initiatives that are designed to enhance students' environmental stewardship and leadership skills, respectively. Kathleen, C.A., and the Innovation Fund Committee (consisting of School leaders) will then assess each project's success to determine if they should be covered by the regular annual budget in future years.

In thanking the Perlins for their gift, Head of School Russell Shaw said the Innovation Fund provides "an entrepreneurial atmosphere for staff to take their imaginative concepts and transition them to reality" and enables the School to tap into its collective brain trust. "What's more, the fund will allow us to be more efficient in our budgeting process, helping us to create room for exploration," Russell said.

DURING ECO-MARKET DAY, STUDENTS SWAPPED BOOKS AND CLOTHES AMONGST THEMSELVES.





STUDENTS AND OTHER VISITORS AT THE GDS GREENHOUSE

A LENS OF HOPE

LS SCIENCE TEACHER Kathleen Dawson has been doing what she can to teach students about environmental stewardship, but sometimes the grim facts can feel disheartening.

Devastating floods and wildfires. Melting glaciers. Extreme weather. Poor air quality. It's no wonder that mental health therapists are reporting heightened "climate anxiety" or "eco-grief" among their clients, a trend that's affecting the younger generation in particular. A survey in *The Lancet Planetary Health* found that 59% of children and young adults globally (the United States included) are "very or extremely worried" about climate change and more than half say they feel sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, *and* guilty about the state of the planet.

"I've really been thinking about how to incorporate climate education into my teaching with a more hopeful lens," Kathleen said. "If I'm teaching fourth graders about greenhouse gases, I also want to spend a portion of the class teaching them about the amazing things that people are doing to help so that they can feel hopeful and empowered about the future."

With that in mind, Kathleen teamed up with Chris Oster (GDS Environmental Stewardship and Campus Commuting Manager) and MS science teachers Louise Micallef and Carly Rizzuto to come up with a plan that would help GDS mitigate the effects of climate change.

Through the Innovation Fund, they won a grant that covers the cost of GDS membership in the Climate Action Accelerator Program (CAAP). The three-year program helps schools reduce their carbon footprint. Starting in September, GDS will be among the fourth cohort of schools to enter the program, which means that a committee of GDS representatives will work with climate experts, CAAP leaders, and peer schools for 30 hours annually to devise a climate action plan for the School.

The committee will consist of students, teachers, administrators, and staff, as required by CAAP. Having a cross-section of voices at the table is meant to promote a whole-school framework for tackling environmental issues instead of piecemeal projects–a task made easier now that all GDS divisions are united on one campus.

"This is a call to action on the environmental front for the School," Chris said. "This program is going to start us on a path to creating a plan that makes sense for us, and in three years, we should be able to work in an autonomous fashion with support from the peer network that we gained along the way."

This summer, Chris will work with Kathleen, Louise, and Director of Operations and Innovation Tim Lyons to organize a CAAP committee. (Carly will be leaving GDS to work on climate action projects.) Together, they will take inventory of GDS's existing environmental initiatives, such as the composting of cafeteria lunches, sustainable transportation efforts, the Policy Institute's environmental justice track, and various student-led clubs and activities.

The GDS team heard about CAAP when they attended the Green School Conference in New Orleans during the summer of 2023. Soon after, Kathleen read *Hope Matters: Why Changing the Way We Think Is Critical to Solving the Environmental Crisis*, a book recommended by CAAP that reframed her thinking on sustainability.

"The book encouraged me to look at climate news with a different lens, which helped with my own eco-anxiety," Kathleen said. "After reading it, I felt excited and inspired to enhance my curriculum."



CLAIRE SIMON '24

IN RECOGNITION OF EARTH DAY, THE STUDENT ACTION COMMITTEE HOSTED ECO-MARKET DAY IN APRIL WITH OFFERINGS THAT INCLUDED A CLOTHING SWAP AND STATIONS FOR MAKING WILDFLOWER BOMBS.

Some schools involved with the program have revamped the way they handle waste, recycling, and energy use–and saved money in the process. They have weaved climate change education into their curriculum, and they've done so with buy-in from school administrators, teachers, and the student body. "We spoke to past and present CAAP schools, and everyone gave glowing reviews for the program," Chris added.

CAAP, run by a Canadian-registered charity called DoorNumberOne.org, also stood out as a viable option because it caters solely to independent schools, most of which are similar in size and culture to GDS. Nearly all the schools are in Canada, and many of them are in urban areas and therefore understand the constraints of working with limited outdoor learning spaces.

Kathleen also noted that taking part in this type of program is well aligned with GDS's values, including its commitment to social justice (of which environmental justice is key), its programming around student health and wellness, and its pledge to prepare students to become agents of change in the world.

But that preparation does not mean that the younger generation alone should tackle the climate crisis, Kathleen said. "Yes, we're excited about young people's huge potential," she said. "But we as adults should do everything in our power to help them along the way so that they don't feel all this weight on their shoulders. This is a huge motivation behind what we're doing with CAAP."

A LENS OF PURPOSE

FOR YEARS, High School Science teacher C.A. Pilling has been thinking about opportunities to have students engage in "everyday" leadership–the type that comes without titles or formal recognition.

"I want students to focus on those untitled moments when they can take action and do the right thing regardless of their station in a group or a wider community," C.A. said. "I always tell them that leaders are defined by the decisions they make and the actions they take. I try to talk to them about leadership in everything I do."

In applying for the Innovation Fund, C.A. made a pitch that connected her passion for instilling leadership skills in students with her love of the outdoors. Prior to joining GDS in 1996, C.A. worked in the environmental policy field. Her expertise informs the materials she covers in Upper Level environmental science classes and the many School outings she has arranged, including an end-of-year trip to Yosemite National Park for juniors and seniors.

The Yosemite tradition started in the 2021-22 school year when C.A. was eager to get students out in nature again after most Covid-19 pandemic restrictions were lifted. "I spent a lot of time in Yosemite and know a lot of people there," C.A. said. "I felt that would be a good place to extend the topics we talk about in class."



At about the same time, C.A. started attending workshops hosted by the World Leadership School (WLS), which offers programs that help teachers and students reimagine school as a platform for empowering people to identify their purpose in life. Inspired by her own training, C.A. invited WLS to offer leadership training last year for the GDS students who had signed up for the Yosemite trip. The students completed two, two-hour online sessions in the spring followed by a day-long, in-person Purpose Summit at GDS. In mid-June, they were off to Yosemite, unpacking what they had learned as they backpacked and hiked their way through the park.

"I thought: Let's see how this plays out. Let's see what conversations come up around the fire at night. Let's see who steps up for activities during the day," C.A. said. "Being outdoors is the great equalizer. People have to lead during moments in which they are mentally or physically challenged. We have to set up tents and cook at night and take charge of our days."



HS SCIENCE TEACHER C.A. PILLING TOOK STUDENTS TO YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK LAST SUMMER AFTER THEY RECEIVED LEADERSHIP TRAINING.

Lina Fawaz '24 said she had never been backpacking before, and she was surprised by how physically taxing it was to carry gear during hours-long hikes. She also had to adjust to covering all that ground and sharing all the related tasks with students she didn't know very well at the start of the trip. "Forcing me to interact with people and form connections is a life skill I'm going to need now that I'm heading off to college in the fall," Lina added.

The experiment went so well that C.A. wanted to make it–or some version of it–a mainstay at GDS. The Innovation Grant will help defray the costs of the Yosemite Purpose/Leadership Program (which is paid for out of pocket by families) and hopefully attract a more economically diverse pool of applicants. But C.A. also hopes that GDS will integrate this type of programming into the fabric of the School, perhaps by offering it in different contexts, such as training for seniors in May or for freshmen when they first enter the High School.

"My hope would be to run the (program) as a pilot for 2024 with an eye toward designing additional program offerings in 2025," C.A. said. "There's an opportunity for us to be more deliberate about teaching leadership skills."



DANIELLE GOLDART (MIDDLE) WATCHES (CLOCKWISE) FIRST GRADERS VERA, JOSÉPHINE, KENNEDY, AND ASHER DECODE INDIVIDUAL WORDS USING SOUNDS THEY LEARNED.

LS TEACHERS RALLY AROUND AN APPROACH TO READING

GETTING ON THE SAME PAGE

AT THE START OF ONE FRIDAY CLASS, Danielle Goldart's 1st grade students break down each word she reads from an index card. They tap their fingers on the forearms for each sound they hear. They pound their fists for each syllable. At times, they sky-write letters and use "granny" and "robot" voices just for giggles as they say the words out loud.

But embedded in the fun and games is a teaching approach known as "structured literacy," which is based on decades of research into how the brain learns to read. This academic year, all Lower School homeroom teachers started applying this method in their classes. Through the School's summer grant program, each teacher has undergone intensive training during one of the past two summers in a popular structured literacy program called Orton-Gillingham.

The Orton-Gillingham method offers a sequenced introduction to basic phonics. Students start by segmenting small units of sound and connecting the sounds with letters before learning to blend the sounds and form words. Grasping these phonological awareness skills teaches students to convert symbols to sounds (reading) and sounds to symbols (spelling), said Chair of Learning Support Resources Kim Palombo. As for the pounding and tapping, sensory input is thought to help students isolate syllables and sounds and commit what they're learning to memory.

INDEPENDENCE THROUGH STRUCTURE

Tackling literacy in that way is especially helpful in mastering English, a "deep" language that has 44 sounds



FIRST GRADE STUDENTS (LEFT TO RIGHT) HEIDI, IDA, AND ARI PLAY A MEMORY-STYLE SPELLING AND READING GAME.

for 26 letters–unlike Italian, Spanish, and other "shallow" languages in which there is a one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds, Kim said. She particularly appreciates the logical way that Orton-Gillingham rolls out material to students and helps them understand the structure of the English language.

"We're getting kids to become more independent readers by being more structured," Kim said. "Structure does not create rigidity. It allows kids to understand where the boundaries are so that they can move freely around the cabin."

In Danielle's Friday class, students play games that blend beginning letters with -ick,-ock, -uck, or -eck to form words. They review "red" words that do not follow the usual spelling-sound patterns. On other days, they may learn a new spelling rule or read a book with sounds and words they know to promote fluency–or reading smoothly, just the way they speak.

"The approach is to make sure that kids are getting auditory, visual, and kinesthetic practice with sounds and red words," Danielle said. "It's very exciting to see how the kids are really paying attention to sounds and syllabication and applying the specific strategies they're taught to the words they're trying to decode."

SOUNDING FAMILIAR?

If phonics rings a bell with some of today's parents, that's because some form of phonics has existed in classrooms since the 1950s, falling in and out of favor at various times as competing pedagogies came into play.

But the tide is turning back toward phonics, in part because of the wildly popular "Sold a Story" podcast, which examined how the nation had drifted away from decades of scientific research on the most effective strategies for teaching kids how to read.

Much of that research was laid out in a landmark report in 2000 that identified five must-have concepts for effective reading instruction–including phonics and phonic awareness, which relates to the number of sounds in a spoken word, not just the number of letters.

Fourth Grade Teacher Payal Sangani said the podcast got her excited about getting trained in structured literacy at GDS. Recently, Payal's students spent some time on base words ending in "y," such as supply. They learned when to drop the "y" (supplied) and when to keep it (supplying).

"We're learning about when the rules hold and when there are exceptions," Payal said. "When they're writing, I hear them say things like: 'Oh yeah, there needs to be a 'y' here.' That tells me that they're taking what they're learning and applying it independently."

CONSISTENCY IS KEY

Previously at GDS, teachers were pulling from various phonics-based learning programs, said LS Assistant Principal Denise Jones. "But there was growing recognition that we needed consistency," Denise added. "We moved with intent toward systematic instruction to make sure that we're all following the same conventions and providing the best foundational literacy skills for young learners."

For learning specialists like Kim, structured literacy techniques are nothing new. She's been using these strategies for 15 years while working with students with learning differences. In fact, the term "structured literacy" was coined by the International Dyslexia Association in 2016.

While the approach is critical for kids with dyslexia, Kim said, research shows it benefits everyone. "The most mission-aligned thing that we can do at GDS," she said, "is have systematic instruction so that all kids have the same access to reading."



Rachel in Bolivia performing an echocardiogram on a patient

ALUMNI HAVE ANSWERS

RACHEL MARCUS '85 SHEDDING LIGHT ON A NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASE



Raising awareness of Chagas at Holy Cross Health

RACHEL MARCUS '85 CREDITS HER CAREER TRAJECTORY in large part to Jan Braumuller, the now-retired GDS High School Spanish teacher who encouraged her to apply for a public health service program called Amigos de las Américas.

Jan figured this hands-on program in Latin America would appeal to Rachel, an aspiring doctor who loved speaking Spanish. And it did. Through Amigos, Rachel worked for a vaccination program in Paraguay the summer after her junior year. "My time there made me feel a real affinity for Latin America and working with Spanish speakers and people who are indigent," said Rachel, parent of Abe '18, Saul '20, and Rose '23 Atwood. "Jan's suggestion showed that she understood me."

Today, Rachel is a cardiologist and co-founder of the Latin American Society of Chagas, or LASOCHA. The Northern Virginia-based nonprofit helps raise awareness about Chagas, a parasitic disease that mostly affects impoverished communities in Latin America. LASOCHA also tests and treats DC-area immigrants who are at risk for the disease.

Rachel spoke to *Georgetown Days* about how she became a leading expert on Chagas in the United States and why U.S. doctors need to learn more about it. This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

"...I CAME BACK WITH A NEW APPRECIATION OF WHAT POVERTY LOOKS LIKE AND REALIZED THAT I REALLY ENJOYED WORKING IN A THIRD-WORLD ENVIRONMENT WHERE I COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE."
RACHEL MARCUS

Q How did your summer in Latin America shape your career goals? During my six weeks in Paraguay, I helped vaccinate people for measles and yellow fever in very rural, poor communities. Sometimes, we'd have to hike three hours to get to our outpost. It was eye-opening. I came back with a new appreciation of what poverty looks like and realized that I really enjoyed working in a third-world environment where I could make a difference.

My parents are both physicians, and I wanted to be a doctor for as long as I can remember. So I went to college knowing that I would apply to medical school. I majored in Political Science with a focus on Latin American issues so I could better understand the region. My goal was to become an academic tropical medicine expert doing research in the developing world. I was hopeful that I would end up living in Latin America someday.

Q Did you ever return to Latin America? After graduating from medical school at Stanford in 1994, I did three years of residency (two at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and one at Stanford) and then a three-year fellowship in cardiology at Stanford. I did two rotations in Brazil during that time.

In Brazil, I met a physician who was an expert in Chagas disease. He'd been working in the same area of Brazil where Carlos Chagas, a Brazilian physician, first described what would come to be known as Chagas disease. He connected me with a cardiologist there, and I shadowed her for several weeks. I learned Portuguese along the way, and I loved the entire experience. I came back with more knowledge about Chagas than most U.S. physicians. But it was a niche knowledge, and I didn't expect to do anything with it.

Q How do people get Chagas disease? The disease is caused by a parasite that is mostly transmitted to people by triatomine insects, known as kissing bugs, vampire bugs, or cone-nose bugs. It can also be passed from mother to baby during pregnancy and through contaminated food. The earlier you treat the disease the more likely you are to cure it. But many people don't know they are infected because symptoms may not show up for decades (if at all), which is why screening for the disease is crucial. Chagas can lead to lethal heart problems and intestinal damage.

Q How prevalent is Chagas disease in the United States? If you went to medical school in the U.S., you were probably taught about it as a disease you'd never see unless you went to Latin America. That was pretty true until millions of people started to move from endemic countries to the United States. Certain pockets of the U.S. now have many Latin American immigrants who are at risk for the disease, and the Washington, DC area immigrant community is at the highest risk in the country. The CDC estimates that more than 300,000 individuals in the United States have this parasitic infection.

But the community of at-risk Latin American immigrants has a tough time advocating for itself because most of the people affected do not speak English, and they tend to be poor and uninsured. A significant portion of them are undocumented. Insurance programs and policies for the indigent vary from state to state, so there's no coherent strategy for dealing with this problem. On top of that, Chagas disease is tough to diagnose and treat, and many U.S. doctors still don't know much about it.

Q How did you get involved in screening for and treating the disease? After my residency, I joined a practice on K Street working with two senior cardiologists. It was a wonderful practice that allowed me to connect with many fascinating people in a real mom-and-pop kind of atmosphere. But I was not working with the population of patients that I went into medicine to serve. So I contacted Dr. Peter Hotez, a leading expert on neglected tropical diseases [and chair of the microbiology at the George Washington School of Medicine at the time] to discuss my situation. I think it was Dr. Hotez who suggested I work with the at-risk Latin American immigrant population in Northern Virginia.

I left my practice in 2012 and threw myself into reading everything I could about Chagas disease. I spent hours on the internet printing out papers and speaking to anyone I could about it. A couple of months later, I met Jenny Sanchez, who would become the co-founder of LASOCHA.

Q Why did you and Jenny launch LASOCHA?
Jenny is a microbiologist and a Bolivian immigrant who wanted to get screened for Chagas when she was pregnant with her son. She was surprised to find that her doctor in Northern Virginia had not heard of the disease, and she figured that thousands of people living in Northern Virginia faced a similar challenge. She wanted to start a nonprofit to deal with this issue and got connected with Doctors Without Borders, and it was Doctors Without Borders that connected Jenny and me. We created LASOCHA in 2013. [Jenny is currently president and Rachel is medical director of the group.]

Q What has LASOCHA achieved in the past decade?
We've screened about 2,400 people in the DC metropolitan area for Chagas disease, and 4% of them tested positive. We've also collaborated with many experts, healthcare organizations, and even embassies to help achieve our goals. For instance, we partnered with Johns Hopkins University from 2016 to 2018 to help them perform a large-scale screening study of immigrants, and we inherited those patients for our clinic.

I also spend a lot of my time raising awareness within the medical community. I've written several papers on the topic, and I regularly speak at academic conferences, nationally and internationally. Generally, I see patients once a week for free at our clinic. That's in addition to my day job at MedStar Health, where I am a heart ultrasound specialist. I run the program at the MedStar hospitals based in Baltimore.

Q What is your biggest challenge in keeping this organization running? Everything we do for LASOCHA is done on a volunteer basis, and we rely on the generosity of so many different partners to keep the operation running. Tu Family Medical and Vision Clinic in Falls Church lets me use its clinic space rent-free to see patients. Inbios International donates rapid test kits. Dr. Robert Gilman at Johns Hopkins lets us use some of his cardiac testing equipment. Slowly but surely, we're making progress. But we need more financial support. We rely on donations for testing supplies, educational materials, supplies for our cardiac testing machines, and malpractice insurance.



Screening fair in Silver Spring, MD with the Embassy of Guatemala

Testing patients at LASOCHA's free clinic.

Learn more about LASOCHA's work and needs at lasocha.org



GETTING INSIDE ZAK SANDLER'S HEAD

Zak Sandler '04 at one of this school year's Social Justice Teach-In Days, a series of workshops that take place in lieu of classes.



Zak Sandler '04 speaks to students during one of his many presentations at GDS.

FOR ZAK SANDLER '04, songwriting turned out to be a form of therapy in 2015 when he created the musical *Something About Me*, a fictional version of his experience being bipolar disorder, a mental condition that surfaced during his undergraduate college years.

In its earliest iteration, the show was performed only for family and friends. It has since evolved into an autobiographical play that has been repeatedly reworked and renamed to chronicle how the three manic episodes of Zak's life have reshaped his relationship with himself and others. The most recent version of the musical, *Inside My Head*, has been performed in various venues–from the Kennedy Center to National Alliance on Mental Illness conventions to GDS.

"The students were captivated," said HS history teacher Sue Ikenberry, who saw Zak perform his play at the School's Mental Health Teach-In Day in January 2024. "I think knowing about the experiences, about these symptoms, will help them. … Zak offered a good narrative about how he came to terms with his condition over time. It's a hopeful message."

In addition to writing musicals, Zak is a life coach and a mental health advocate who embraces emotional transparency by speaking openly about his bipolar experiences. Previously, he worked as a pianist on Broadway for several productions, including *Mean Girls, Wicked, Motown,* and *The Color Purple.*

"At some level, I knew that if I told my story, it would put information into the world," Zak said. "Sharing our own stories is a part of [activism]. And so that's one thing that I'm doing with this show, and I'm presenting it in an honest, vulnerable way."

"TRAPPED IN MY BODY. TRAPPED IN MY CIRCUMSTANCES."

Zak was a junior and a promising art and drama student at Yale University in 2007 when he started feeling hopeless and alone even though he was surrounded by friends. "Trapped in My Body. Trapped in My Circumstances," Zak wrote in a lyric describing his despair at the time.

Then came a burst of energy that generated what he calls a "39-page ideological thought salad" about God and religion and mankind's shared truths and dreams–all of it typed furiously on his laptop during three sleepless nights. His mother (a social worker) and father (a psychiatrist) grew alarmed when they received a 4 a.m. call from their son during one of his writing frenzies. They hopped in the car to make the trip from DC to New Haven.



Zak Sandler '04 (on the keyboard) and cast performing *Inside My Head* in New York at a convention hosted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness

"When my parents arrive, they bring me to a school psychiatrist," Zak wrote, capturing in song and narrative what happened next. "He asks me a few questions, then whispers with my parents. He turns to me and says: 'Mr. Sandler, we're sending you to the hospital.'"

Until then, Zak had not suspected that he was bipolar, though he now realizes that he had classic symptoms. The condition is characterized by dramatic mood swings, including mania (extreme highs) and depression (extreme lows), according to the Mayo Clinic. The mania that Zak experienced led to hospitalization and paranoid delusions. Alone at night in his hospital bed, he heard a voice. "If you fall asleep before sunrise" it said, "you will die."

Nine years passed, and then it happened again. Another manic episode that led to another hospitalization. "At that point, I accepted what was happening with me," Zak said. "I didn't go out telling a lot of people, but I also didn't hide it." Later that year, he decided to write about his experience, which led to the first version of the play.

"I'M CLOUDY"

Medications probably saved Zak's life, but finding the right ones took trial and error.

At times, the drugs he was prescribed kept him on an even keel but zapped his creativity. As Zak puts it in his play, one medication could make his head "cloudy … can't create or write a song" until a new medication makes his mind feel "like a clear blue sky, brain magic at its best."

It was during one of those clear sky stretches that Zak secured a reliable personal assistant job in New York and got accepted into an exclusive songwriters workshop. But then came the downturn, when his medications failed him. In 2017, he was hospitalized for his third manic episode, his most traumatic one.

Against that backdrop, it may seem peculiar that a 2020 article in *Psychiatric News* described *Inside My Head* as a "lively, poignant, and funny" musical. The article points to Zak's decision to create characters who personify his moods–Doug his depression, Marc his mania, and Patty his paranoia. Zak hoped that doing so would make his condition more accessible to a general audience.

"I wanted to convey what it is like to go through these experiences of depression and mania and maybe help people see that it is more relatable than they may think," Zak told the publication.

"I DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING"

Today, Zak is working with his wife Lenna Jawdat (whom he married last year) to bring a new version of *Inside My Head* to Broadway. The play, called *Polarized*, returns to the original formula of making the lead character fictional but based on Zak's real-life experience.

During a TEDx event in Anchorage, Alaska last year, Zak talked about how he has reframed his thinking about his "mood condition" since his first manic episode more than a decade ago. Back then, he was ashamed of having "lost my mind," he said, scared of losing it again, and terrified that if word of the incident got out, he would lose his friends, his position as music director of his a cappella group, and his shot at any decent jobs in the future.

"I had yet to learn that in the words of Ernest Hemingway, who himself was likely bipolar: 'We are all broken. That's how the light gets in,'" Zak told the audience. He said he no longer thinks of his condition as an "illness" but rather as part of him, even a "superpower."

Alexander Hamilton most likely experienced hypomania (a milder form of mania) that can fuel intense productivity and heightened creativity, which may explain how he managed to write 51 of the 85 Federalist papers in eight months, Zak told the crowd. Singer Demi Lovato, he added, credited her ability to write up to seven songs in one night to her hypomania.

Basically, Zak figured out that he doesn't have it all figured out, and that's okay. As he revealed in one lyric: "When you know you don't know everything, you know more than before."



Left to Right: Arica Shepherd '15, Julie Fanburg '89, and Director of Alumni Engagement Correy Hudson

A Night for Connecting : GDS joined Flint Hill School and The Potomac School to co-host a networking event designed to help their respective alumni build professional connections, explore career opportunities, and exchange insights about various fields. Net@Night offered many industry-specific tables—one of which featured GDS parent Julie Fanburg '89, who runs her own staffing agency, NerdUp! The gathering, which took place at the Venture X co-working space in Arlington, attracted nearly three dozen alumni for the first of what will be a series of similar events.

Partying Through the Decades: A holiday party sponsored by the GDS Black Alumni Council took place in December at The Century Club. The gathering goes back years, initially starting as a private get-together hosted by Kamal Ali '80 and Leroy Nesbitt '78 for their friends who were home for the holidays. Now expanded to include any GDS alumni home for the holidays, Kamal and Leroy call all GDS alums friends.



Black Alumni Council party

ALUMNI ROUNDUP







Athletic Alums: In November, GDS alumni joined Hopper student-athletes for soccer (left) and volleyball (middle) games just before Thanksgiving break. Two months later, GDS recognized former student-athletes during Sports Saturday, when the GDS men's and women's basketball played hard-fought games and the wrestling team held its first home match of the season. The recognition ceremony (right) took place during halftime at the Varsity women's basketball game against DC International.

FINAL THOUGHTS

GDS HIGHLIGHTS

ALUMNI

Lauren R. Taylor '75 co-authored *Get Empowered: A Practical Guide to Thrive, Heal, and Embrace Your Confidence in a Sexist World.* Queer activist **Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore '91** released her new memoir *Touching the Art*, which explores her fraught relationship with her late grandmother (a Baltimore-based abstract artist) and the meaning of race, identity, and trauma. **Daniel Klaidman '82** co-authored *Find Me the Votes*, a deep dive into how Trump's efforts to overturn presidential election results led to state charges in Georgia alleging criminal interference.

April marked the release of *My Black Country*, an album featuring the songs of **Alice Randall '77** performed by powerhouse Black female artists. The album's release coincides with the arrival of Alice's book by the same name, which explores the influence of Black country artists on music and American culture. Alice, an award-winning songwriter and a novelist, is the first Black woman to co-write a chart-topping country hit–Trisha Yearwood's "XXX's and OOO's".

Derrick Rutledge '79 received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Beauty Industry and Community Awards (BICA), which celebrates the talent and achievements of beauty industry professionals.

Kelly AuCoin '85 is starring in FX's Clipped

Sarah Stillman '02, a staff writer for *The New Yorker,* won the Pulitzer Prize in the explanatory reporting category for her story on the felony murder legal doctrine and its consequences for communities of color.

Gabe London and '95 and **Charlie Sadoff '87** co-wrote *The Definition of Insanity*, a documentary about the innovative Miami-Dade Community Mental Health Project that helps prisoners with mental health problems. The film aired nationally on PBS. It was directed by Gabe, produced by Charlie, and hosted by the Matthew Harris Ornstein Memorial Foundation, established in honor of **Matthew Ornstein '98.**

CJ Greenhill Caldera '10 is now a curatorial assistant at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

The *Journal of High School Science* published the findings of an investigation by **Emily Scarrow '21**, **Eve Kolker '22, Daniel Farber '23, Keevan Keegan '23,** and **Percival Lui '23.** The investigation, which used planarian worms as a model for understanding new ways to attack cancer cells, started in the Research Science course taught by Bill Wallace, now retired.

Tatiana Nazlymov '23 qualified for the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, where she will compete in the individual and team events in women's saber for the U.S Olympic fencing team.

Kennedy Taylor, who attended GDS until 8th grade, recently finished among the top 10 finalists in the 2024 Miss America competition, where she represented Maryland.

STUDENTS

Augur Bit editor-in-chief **Callie Solomon '25** and managing editors **Peter Kumar '25** and **Jeremiah Farr '25** won second place in the Private School Journalism Association's editorial leadership contest.

Tennis enthusiasts **Maya '24** and **Bodi '26 De** created a nonprofit group, Adaptive Tennis DMV, to promote para-standing tennis for local athletes with physical disabilities who do not want to use a wheelchair while playing. In April, their group co-hosted the area's first para-standing tennis clinic at Georgetown Prep Tennis Club with Junior Tennis Champions Center of Gaithersburg and the DC office of Hanger Clinic, a orthopedic rehabilitation center. The siblings' efforts were featured in *Bethesda Magazine* and on the local *Fox News* affiliate.

Logan Shaw '33 received a medal for placing 21st out of 409 participants for the "under 800" division of the U.S. Chess Federation's 2024 National High School (K-12) Championship. He won five out of seven matches, drew one, and lost one. He played high school students for six of his seven games. **Thalia Grigsby '28** and **Jason Saferstein '31** also participated in the championship.

FACULTY

MS Principal **Kelsey Twist Schroeder**, a Baltimore native and former Stanford University lacrosse player, was inducted into the Greater Baltimore Lacrosse Foundation Hall of Fame.



Maya '24 and Bodi '26 De

SUBMIT YOUR NEWS!

PLEASE SEND INFORMATION FOR THE MAGAZINE TO DINA@GDS.ORG

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ASK A TEACHER



MS HISTORY TEACHER TOUSSAINT LACOSTE WITH EVY GILROY '28

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN YOUR HISTORY CLASS?

I emphasize the use of accurate, primary sources in my class, and I also stress that history is a big treasure hunt. A good historian has to be a good researcher, problem solver, and investigator. That doesn't happen by typing into a Google search engine to find a quick answer or snapshot of a chapter in history. There's always more to learn and more to dig into, and I want students to gain an appreciation for research.

At the start of the last school year, Evy Gilroy ['28] gave me a personalized t-shirt with a catchphrase that she came up with: I Trust Toussaint More than Google. She has a matching shirt. I was so proud because it showed that what I've been saying had an impact and that maybe I'm an ok history teacher. It's become a running joke. I've worn it to School three or four times, and some students from that class still ask me when I'll wear it again.